

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY



125 418

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

'ALLO GOOD-BY

ZEPHINE HUMPHREY

has also written

THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

WINTERWISE

CHRYSLIS

GREEN MOUNTAINS TO SIERRAS

"... an American travel book which will rank among the really good travel books of all lands."

—*The New York Herald Tribune.*

"Beauty and freedom is in every page."

—Herschel Brickell.

CACTUS FOREST

"It (the book) is full of enjoyable description and pithy comment."—*The New York Times Book Review.*

"... ought to be invaluable as a guide to any one thinking of heading for the desert, and it's most excellent reading for any one who isn't."

—Herschel Brickell, *The New York Post.*

"It's a quiet book, restful as few accounts of automobile journeys are; after all, the essence of any journey is the people who make it. It's the Vermont flavor which spices this Arizona odyssey."

—Lewis Gannett, *New York Herald Tribune.*



Published by

E. P. DUTTON & CO., INC.

{ 'Allo Good-by }

By
ZEPHINE HUMPHREY

With Endpaper Map



NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & CO., INC.
1940

COPYRIGHT, 1940
BY E. P. DUTTON & CO., INC
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
PRINTED IN THE U.S. A.

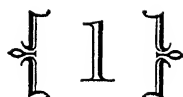
FIRST EDITION

To my dear sister
BESSIE HUMPHREY
I very lovingly dedicate
this book.

-

'ALLO GOOD-BY

-



WE THOUGHT we were getting out just in time.

Therefore, when we had hung a small tree with doughnuts and suet for the winter birds, when we had made sure that the water was turned off and the electric switch thrown, when we had locked all the windows and doors and put the key to the kitchen door on a certain shelf in the garage for the convenience of anyone who really wanted to get in, when we had done all these things and had shut ourselves into our car, we derided the snowflakes wandering tentatively through the bleak November air. We should worry! In fact, we found our pleasure of departure enhanced by the oncoming storm.

But now we know that it gave warning, not only to the valley we left, but also to us who fared forth. A winter was impending which, in one way or another, would try the souls of men and women wherever they might be.

Our particular errand was physical. Two years before, we had had to leave home because of sciatica in one of our legs. This winter it was one of our ears which ejected us. A eustachian congestion drove us both distracted (along different nerve paths, however!) by an inner cacophony and a resultant deaf-

ness. Said our ear doctor: "Now you come to me for a final treatment; then beat it as fast as you can for a warm, dry climate."

Arizona was the answer, of course. Especially since it had cured our leg. But it lay so far away that we thought we would first try conclusions with South-eastern refuges nearer at hand. Moreover, we had friends we wanted to see in various Eastern towns. So, not knowing our ultimate destination, we headed down through the Berkshires toward New York.

It was bitterly cold for November. The snow, gathering power and purpose, blew in a dry powder across the road and began heaping itself into little drifts among the dead leaves. The sky was an ominous, uniform dull gray. The stripped hills looked hostile and hard.

"Oh, Christopher," I lamented, closing the window beside me and turning up my coat collar, "it's evident that I'm getting old. I used to love a day like this."

"Summoning and majestic," quoted Christopher.

"Fateful and sublime," I added. "The Tragic Muse."

"Well," reasoned Christopher, "it's part of the fun of living to get fresh points of view. You now know how the other half feels, perhaps even the other four-fifths. Not many people like winter. It's always been a symbol of their discontent.

"Anyway," he continued, "consistency has nothing to do with our case this year. We've got an ear.

"Which seems to be getting off on the wrong foot," he concluded sententiously.

And indeed the little member was kicking up a rumpus.

Our first night allayed it, however. Safe within the warm, friendly walls of that superlative hostelry, the Alumnae House of Vassar College, eating delicious food, talking with the professor whose guests we were, sleeping soundly in soft beds, we forgot our misgivings, and even woke in the morning, sure of a happy day.

Until Christopher went to the window. Then:

"Gosh!" he said after a prolonged moment of motionless contemplation. "No, stay where you are," he went on hastily. "You'd better let me prepare you. It's lucky I can put my hand right on my chains."

By this time of course I was at the window beside him and we were both looking out at a snow-heaped world which was worthy of the Arctic Circle, not to say Vermont. Neither of us made any comment. We left it to our ear.

Even with chains, the drive through the Parkway was a ticklish business that morning. Other cars, less prudently equipped or less carefully driven, were stalled at rakish angles all along the road. Several were in the ditch. It was Thanksgiving Day, and the faces of people thus stopped on their way to family reunions wore highly complex expressions. A defiant innocence, deeply tinged with uneasy chagrin, prevailed in the eyes of the men, while those of the tight-lipped women looked virtuously forbearing. Only the children were candid, loudly deploring the

distance which lay between them and turkey. We felt almost guilty and certainly very unhandsome as, with our self-righteous chains clanking, we proceeded on our way; and I did not in the least resent the black looks which followed us. I only hoped the noise we were making would comfort somebody with the conviction that such a loosely boastful pride must precede a fall.

That it did not was probably due to the fact that we stopped in White Plains and put our car in a garage. A technique of driving acquired and developed in Vermont suits snowy Parkways better than New York traffic, and Christopher had no mind to tackle the latter. Moreover, White Plains is a good point of departure for the South. So we pulled out a suitcase apiece and, with a mixture of relief and bereavement, closed the door which, for the next four months, was to conserve for us all that we possessed of home.

Travel by train had for so long been unfamiliar to us that we hardly knew the ticket booth from the baggage office, or the brakeman from the conductor, and were at a loss to dispose of our bags. No wonder, we thought as we clambered and bumped our way into the dark, stifling vehicle, stumbling over other bags and feet, no wonder the railroad's hour has struck. Except for unusual reasons, nobody would travel thus who could spin lightly over smooth roads, with space and air all about him, freedom to stop or proceed at his will, and the person he likes best be-

side him instead of squeezed into a third of a seat halfway down the aisle.

But our reasons today were unusual, so we made the best of discomfort; and, debouching at last into the Grand Central, solaced ourselves with a couple of the oyster stews for which that place is famous, then took a taxi and drove to our hotel.

Our Thanksgiving turkey awaited us on Riverside Drive, and the appointed hour was in the evening. Therefore, we had plenty of time to rest and dress and indulge in the luxury of a Fifth Avenue bus.

This time-honored institution is one of the very few survivals of New York's past which have known how to lead a new fashion and, at the same time, maintain an old tradition. Its high moral effect is insidious and invaluable. There is something monastic about it. Deliberately and incredibly, the person who boards a Fifth Avenue bus steps apart from the world, abjures its standards and values, separates himself from its restless confusion, and dedicates his soul to an indefinite period of detachment. Yet, more than ever, he is in the swirling vortex of mundane affairs. Now that I come to think of it, I wonder if city bus travel is not one of the devices by which religion maintains its practices among an unbelieving generation. Observe the faces of passengers on their way from Washington Square to Grant's Tomb. Have they not a holy calm? Unless, indeed, they are beset by inner misgivings concerning fixed engagements. In that case, they are apt to drop overboard from the ark of tranquillity into one of the agile taxis cruising along-

side in the hope of precisely such a defection. There's a theme for a modern composer: a new *Tannhäuser* built around a Fifth Avenue bus.

On the Thanksgiving Day of our transit, the city traffic was of course not so dense as usual, but the pace of the bus was measured all the same. It had its dignity to maintain and its red lights to observe. Moreover, the pavements were slippery. Christopher and I, very much at ease, sat side by side, looking out at the hurrying pedestrians and at the shop windows softly radiant with the peculiarly magical light of electricity in the early dusk. How sumptuous they were! Accustomed to the temperate displays of our local Five and Ten and Combination Cash, I had forgotten that such splendor of merchandise existed in the world. Regal suites of furniture, superb hangings, magnificent rugs, dresses and hats and shoes fit for Hollywood, glittering jewels, fragile china: what significant tokens of the civilization whose artifacts they were! Christopher, as a painter, was charmed with the color and grace; but, as an incorrigible moralist, I was disturbed. Why should so much unnecessary richness be piled up for the amusement of a few people, while millions of other people had not enough to eat or wear? A trite reaction of course, perhaps an ageless one. But I had just been reading some books whose insight and wisdom had given glimpses of the potential virtue of the human race, and all this flaunting of an unfair advantage seemed retrogressive and deplorable. I withdrew further into the cloistered seclusion of the bus; and presently the

Hudson River reassured me by spreading its free-for-all beauty along the side of the Drive.

No fresh snow had fallen during the day; and, though the sky was still lowering, we hoped that the storm was over. In the warmth and light of the family circle around the dinner table, we forgot our misgivings and announced our immediate program with confidence. Yes, we were off for the South tomorrow. Precisely whither we did not yet know, but to some warm dry climate where Christopher could paint outdoors, where I could gather material for a new book, and where our ear could be happy. It did not seem to occur to anyone that this was an ambitious project, demanding too much of the Fates; and it was with congratulation and envy that, later in the evening, we were escorted to the elevator and waved down the shaft.

"Good-by! Good-by! Have the best time ever. Send us a card tomorrow from your first stopping place."

Glowing and warm and complacent, we dropped to the tropical region of the foyer, buttoned our coats automatically, and were ushered out through the revolving doors.

Now of all the sins which can be laid to the charge of New York, disingenuousness is surely one of the worst. For two or three hours we had been lapped in every comfort, protected from any least suspicion of predicament. Thick walls and double windows had muffled all elemental noises, heavy curtains had concealed the outer world. In fact, so great was the

artful skill of our contrived environment that we had almost forgotten there was an outer world at all. In the ordered perfection of this huge machine of a city, we had felt assured of uninterrupted well-being. Then, abruptly, brutally, without any warning whatever, the door of felicity swung to behind us, and we were thrust out into a howling blizzard. The shock was staggering.

Perhaps at the North or South Poles, there may be more inclement regions than 114th Street and Riverside Drive, but I do not believe it. For the Poles have no corners, and a wind really needs a corner to be at its best. There on the Drive that evening, Primeval Fury swept down from the northeast, divided at 115th Street, swirled competently around the block, and met us at every angle as we issued forth. Away went both our hats, away went Christopher after them, away went my feet from under my body, away, alas! went the bus which we had counted on taking. "Away! Away! for I will fly with thee." Indeed, I would not. Groping blindly, I found a lamp-post and twined my arms around it, holding on for dear life until Christopher returned with what was left of my hat.

It was probably not more than twenty minutes that we waited for another bus, buffeted, blinded, dazed, sometimes back to back for support, sometimes face to face for protection, but it seemed half a nighttime. Busses do not run often at that hour, and there were no taxis at all. Perhaps it would have been better to

have fought our way up to the subway, but we hoped every minute that the bus would come.

"Infernal place!" muttered Christopher.

"No," I corrected him. "Infernal places are warm and dry."

When at last, oh, at long last, the staggering lights of the bus appeared through the thick snow curtain, we felt like a final belated pair of creatures picked up at the ultimate gasp by Noah. With this pleasant difference that, except for a sympathetic conductor, we had the ark to ourselves. Breathless and quaking, we huddled in a corner and tried not to remember how far it was from the corner of Fifth Avenue and Forty-sixth Street to our hotel.

Once within our warm quiet bedroom whose window opened on a court and therefore enhanced the illusion of security, we delayed our retirement long enough to pack our bags against an early morning departure, then dived under the blankets and pulled them over our heads.

"Let's get up at six and catch the first train," was Christopher's definitive remark.

Now at 6 A.M. late in November the sky is still normally dark; so when our alarm clock woke us, we were not surprised that we needed all the lights in our room in order to dress and put the last things in our bags. Neither, until we descended for breakfast, did we observe the peculiarly muffled quality of the silence that pervaded the world. But in the elevator we were greeted by a gleeful ebony comment: "Some storm!" And the paper which Christopher purchased

displayed in huge headlines the information that all the Eastern states were "in the grip of the worst blizzard since 1888." From the dining-room window we looked out aghast. Snow was piled on the tops of stranded cars to an even depth of twelve inches, snow was heaped in six-foot drifts along the sidewalks, snow was still falling through the grim gray air. A plough had passed through Forty-sixth Street but had apparently not been able to bite very deep, for the few cars which followed in its wake rode the ridges as a boat rides a choppy sea. Never had any thoroughfare looked more completely uninviting.

"Glad our car isn't here," remarked Christopher as we sat down at a table and ordered a breakfast substantial enough to carry us into Pennsylvania.

For not even yet had we realized the extent of our plight.

The paper was kind in its method of enlightening us. Unintentionally so, I am sure, and merely because of its midnight publication. Little by little, as Christopher scanned the first two or three pages, he read scattered paragraphs to the cumulative effect that, north of Virginia, all roads were closed except a few main arteries, and even they were dangerous.

"Meaning?" I said, stopping short in my breakfast at about the New Jersey line.

"Meaning, I suppose," answered Christopher, "that we can't start at all today."

"Well," I commented, after a moment of heavy silence, "it's a grand thing we got up so early, isn't it? And drank so much coffee that we can't go back to

bed. Unfortunately, however, I left my knitting in White Plains."

"Knitting!" scoffed Christopher, rallying from his disappointment. "Listen to the woman! As if that was all she could think of to do in a place so packed with interests as New York."

"Name one," I challenged morosely.

"The Natural History Building," triumphed Christopher on the spur of what I knew to be an abrupt inspiration. "Haven't we always wanted to see the Planetarium? And, after our winter in Arizona, shan't we be likely to find the Indian rooms more enthralling than ever?"

"Well, yes," I conceded, half grudgingly, half with real conviction. "If we can get there, and if . . ."

"Come along!" Christopher cut me short cheerfully.

But this time I triumphed succinctly by pointing to the clock which registered 7:15.

It is one of the deplorable facts of experience that every privilege resents being used as a makeshift, and sulks accordingly. A visit to the Planetarium had indeed long been a cherished desire with me, and I had even several times thought of coming down from Vermont on purpose to see it. But now, falling back on it as a stopgap, I found it not quite so thrilling as I had expected. Immensely instructive of course. To watch those unevenly rhythmic balls and reflect on the illusory nature of time was edifying. How different a day is on Venus from a day on Mercury or the earth. How elastic a year must be to con-

form to a few inches of space or ten yards according to the planetary orbit. Why talk of days and years anyway? Why think of time at all? Only because, somehow or other, the speeding or lagging worlds obey a common pulse-beat; their steps are taken in accord with the measure of a universal dance. I felt calmed as I watched them; ashamed to apply the lesson to my own infinitesimal need, yet aware that, in such a varied cosmos, there can be no absolute standard of size or duration. A thing is as big or as little, as fleeting or as interminable, as important or as trifling as it feels; and everyone has a right to appropriate every value he finds. The sweep of the constellations across the night sky in the great dome upstairs had a still more releasing effect. Time and space were here magnified to the vanishing point.

But in the Indian rooms we came down to earth. On two recent trips to the Southwest, we had come under the spell of American archaeology, and had more and more regretted the overriding of our continent's early culture by the crass usurpation of a social order which, all too often, had no culture at all. We therefore found it both painful and pleasing to look at the museum's serene reconstructions of a simple and happy home life, fitting easily into the natural beauty of its environment, holding great promise of development. In so far as it had been cut short and ended, we grieved. In so far as its value was now belatedly recognized, we took hope for the future. There are many Indians still among us and their traditions are

stubborn. They bide their time, the indefinite but ineluctable time proclaimed by the Planetarium.

Though we did not then realize the fact, our compulsory morning spent in these two departments of the Natural History Building made an excellent preface to our winter's later experience.

But after we had lunched in the museum restaurant, a weariness came upon us which demanded fresh air. So we found a window from which we could take stock of the weather. The snow had ceased falling and, though the gray sky was still unbroken, it seemed a little higher.

"Let's walk across the Park and spend the afternoon in the Metropolitan," suggested Christopher. And I acceded with alacrity.

Once out on the sidewalk, however, we felt the same shock of surprise that had greeted us the evening before, though not to the same degree. The world which, viewed from the window, had looked like an extension of the steam-heated museum, proved bitterly cold and very windy. An army of workers had cleared the Park sidewalks, but we had no desire to explore them. Instead, we boarded a cross-town bus.

Perhaps it may seem unworthy, even rather ridiculous in two seasoned Vermonters to shrink from New York weather thus. How many sub-zero temperatures had we cheerfully faced at home! But Vermont is consistent and candid. Its norm is the open air, and its scattered houses are only enlarged and improved woodchuck holes. New York's norm is artificial, an affair of concrete and iron and steel;

and when the weather invades that, the people feel let down. Moreover, steel and iron enhance the cold. We shivered as, clutching our hats, we hurried up the steps of the Metropolitan.

Nevertheless, it is only in a big city concerned with artificial values that a notable collection of beautiful things can be made. Beguiled and entranced, we wandered through the long galleries, yielding ourselves once more to the spell of ancient meanings, renewing acquaintance with our favorite pictures and casts, welcoming recent additions. Human life seemed deeper and richer because of all this mute testimony to the accepted importance of beauty. Perhaps if people spent more time in picture galleries and less in picture theatres, they would have a nobler opinion of the race to which they belong and would therefore get on with it more hopefully.

As for sheer artifice, this was surely at its best in the long vista of Fifth Avenue as we drove down it late that afternoon. The towers soared into the pale dusk of the evening sky, lights bloomed softly in clusters and golden points. The avenue was like a river flowing slowly and darkly through a brilliant canyon; and, from the vantage of our bus, we marveled at it. If man really desires to set himself apart from and over against the natural universe, he has vindicated his purpose in the towers of New York.

That being so, I think I will pass over the horrors of the filthy snowbanks, the congested traffic around the snowploughs and shovels, the ankle-deep slush on the sidewalks, the unfordable crossings, the reeking

atmosphere. Not until yet another day had ameliorated these conditions, did we dare resume our journey; and when we did so, it was with an unforgettable joy of escape.

{ 2 }

BY THIS time, I was in the grip of the wholly irrational homesickness which always spices my departures from Vermont, no matter how eagerly undertaken; and I hailed the sight of our car in the White Plains garage. That Christopher shared my emotion I knew from the way he leaned forward to turn on the heater.

"Back beside our own hearthstone," said he.

The sun was shining brightly at last, and the crossing of the river at Tarrytown was enjoyable. But the roads were bad on the other side, and, in spite of their clatter, we were glad of our chains. Until one of them broke loose entirely and lashed about like a wild creature, causing road workers to stare at us and other cars to give us a wide berth. Then Christopher drew off to one side, got out, and with numb fingers coerced a bit of wire into a knot.

"We can't need them much further," he said, "and I don't want to buy new ones. With careful driving, these ought to see us through."

Just because the driving was careful, it appeared highly erratic, for it consisted in seeking rather than avoiding snow. The sight of an uncleared portion of roadbed was enough to set us steering straight for it.

Well, approximately straight. To keep at least two wheels protected from the grinding concrete became Christopher's sole aim in life. Nevertheless, we had not driven twenty miles before another chain broke loose.

Now Christopher is a very reasonable person. But his patience sometimes carries him to a point which verges on stubbornness. Rather than give in and confess himself beaten by those old chains, he was willing to get out and wrestle with them every fifteen minutes. And I abetted him. To people traveling south on a small budget, the purchase of new chains in mid-New Jersey seemed fantastic. Never mind if our progress was slow. Never mind if we were a public nuisance. Another hour would bring us out of the ice belt. No? Then yet one more hour. Or two. Or three. Clatter, clatter, bang, bang, clap, clatter, bang!

Finally, on the outskirts of a town, both chains broke simultaneously, and the startled car, skidding, took matters into its own wheels by coming to a full stop in front of a garage.

The tumult of our approach had brought all the garage staff to the door, where they stood grinning while, with stern deliberation, Christopher made his forty-fifth exit, removed the chains and, with careful aim and sure purpose, hurled them into a conveniently adjacent rubbish heap.

"Better give me some new ones," he remarked in a tone which bit from his simple words all their apparent mildness.

It was, however, the garage owner who despoiled Christopher's verb of its literal meaning, for he charged so much for the new chains that the heavenly silence in which we drove away was fraught with concern.

"Never mind," I argued. "We just had to have them now, and we can always use them at home."

"Where I could have bought them for half the price," muttered Christopher.

For the rest of the day our wheel tracks described a course more erratic than ever. Desiring nothing more earnestly than an entire escape from snow, we yet availed ourselves anxiously of every diminishing trace of it. With the result that we veered all over the right lane of the road. But our course was normal compared with that of chainless cars which, reeling across the icy pavement, went into ditches or over banks. The wrecking trucks of the region did a good business that day.

Having heard of Newhope, Pennsylvania, as an attractive town, and even having at one time thought of going there to live, we had fully expected to make it our first stop. But when we reached its confines, a local detour forbade us to enter and the only inn we could find in the outskirts looked so forbidding that, reluctantly, we drove on to Doylestown. Here, however, we were received into such a pleasant small hotel that, writing about it months later, on top of a huge mass of subsequent impressions, I still remember it vividly. Our steam-heated bedroom was gracious and glowing, its white-tiled bath was immaculate.

Our dinner downstairs in the cheerful dining-room was excellent and enlivened by festive groups of townspeople who evidently made a practice of entertaining each other here.

Another thing that I do not forget is the radiant beauty of the blue and silver world into which we fared forth the next morning. Frost seems to me very nearly the loveliest of all the magic garments in which earth clothes herself. It is not a garment so much as a veil thrown lightly and transiently over commonplace objects, bewitching them into brief wonder. There beyond Doylestown on that late November morning, the rolling country was shimmering softly beneath a lustrous sun. The air was so mild that we opened both windows and, for an hour or two, were more than content to drive slowly, reveling in the sheer beauty of the world and the joy of our escape from its harsher aspects.

By the time we reached Wilmington, however, and joined the Ocean Highway, the frost veil had been lifted; and, finding a smooth dry pavement beneath our wheels, we removed our expensive chains, stored them in the rear of the car, and, free from the fetters of prudence, gave ourselves over completely to the exhilaration of flight. Our staid speedometer leaped from 35 to 50. We were off, we were away. There was no doubt about it this time. Our wayfaring had begun.

The landscape lent itself to our swift mood by flattening out before us. Negro cabins began to appear, and now and then a high-pillared and deep-

verandahed colonial house. The Mason and Dixon Line is more than a geographical abstraction. Immediately beyond it, "The South" indubitably commences.

The colonial mansions were lovely to look at, standing apart in their wide acres, graceful and dignified; but I found them a little depressing. Their era is over. It was on the Negro cabins that my eyes rested most happily. There was something so quietly cheerful about them, so full of the distilled essence of home, so utterly unpretentious, of course, but also so contented, that the very earth and sky seemed to belong to them. They were like the trees and the rocks: their era was eternal. Perhaps it is true not only that the meek shall inherit the earth, but that they always have inherited it. Not by machine guns and airplane bombs, not even invariably by legal rights, but by a deep unobtrusive possession akin to that of a seed in the soil. Negroes and Indians. It is not for their sakes that Congress convenes, they are not "The American Public," their blood is alien from ours. Yet it may be that, in their steadfast humility, the American continent belongs to them as it never has belonged to our restless race.

Just before we reached Cape Charles, we passed a group of tourist cottages so rare in the East and so attractive that we almost stopped for the night, and wished later that we had done so. But we wanted to catch the first ferryboat in the morning. Surely, we thought, there would be no lack of pleasant lodgings in such an important place as Cape Charles. That

there is indeed one very excellent Tourist Home we learned afterwards from a traveler whose regular spring and autumn beat always pauses there. Just where it is, however, we cannot imagine, for we ransacked the town. Since, this evening, we could not push on to the next borough as we had done the evening before, I finally got out to inspect the least dingy-looking of the tourist accommodations; but I could not bring myself to accept its sordid hospitality. Vividly even yet I can see the rapier gleam of resentment behind the perfunctory suavity of the landlady's face as, floundering in lame excuses, I backed out of the door.

Hotels are always our last resort on our motor journeys; for, besides being expensive, they are generally all precisely alike and therefore uninteresting. But at least, when driven to them, we feel assured of comfort. Not so in Cape Charles. No comfort, no similarity, and luckily no expense. The hotel was a big draughty building, with echoing halls and, in spite of the draughts, an atmosphere redolent of decades of cooking. Our dinner in the glacial dining-room disgraced with us, our dreams in our huge rickety bedroom were haunted by nightmares, our breakfast was unwelcome, and we found no difficulty at all in catching the early morning boat.

The episode was acceptable, however. It is by such experiences that the mettle of travelers is tried and also that the value of happier occasions is enhanced.

In this case, our recompense was immediate. Slipping out of the ferry dock, we found ourselves in a world as radiant with blue and gold as it had been with blue and silver on the previous morning. Blue sky, blue water, golden sunlight sparkling on the crest of every little wave. We stood on the deck, drinking in draughts of fresh air, with a tang of salt in it, until presently our appetites shook off their queasiness and we entered the restaurant and ordered a pot of coffee.

That two-hour transit of the mouth of Chesapeake Bay is a real ocean voyage. Much of the time, one is out of sight of land. Gulls wheel and ocean liners pass. A buoyant mood of peace and liberation invades the traveler, and he is immensely refreshed. Christopher yielded to the friendly advances of a chatty fellow-tourist; but, although (in fact, because) I thought I saw an attendant wife in the offing, I unhandsomely slipped around to the other side of the boat where I could sit in silence and solitude.

We were to have stopped in Norfolk to call on some relatives. But when we consulted a local map, we found that our route would take us through the city, and our rural distrust of traffic reasserted itself. Moreover, the hour was now approaching lunch time, and it is a hard-and-fast rule with us not to burst in on people at inconvenient moments. So we wrote a card of greeting and regret, posted it in a suburban box, and drove on to Elizabeth City where we had one of the "shore dinners" in which the Ocean Highway specializes.

During the afternoon our road straightened out to

run smoothly between piny swamps and wide fields of beans in process of threshing. I thought the swamps very beautiful, but Christopher reminded me that they formed part of the Dismal Swamp region so perilous to explorers and soldiers, and then my admiration was tinged with dismay and a new esteem for human fortitude.

In Newbern, North Carolina, our faith in hotel standards was revived by a hostelry where (and for a modest sum too) we were given a pleasant room with two beds and a bath and where we made up for the night before by sleeping abysmally. There are times when the most unconventional traveler, bent on as great a variety as possible, desires nothing so much as sheer creature comfort: steam heat, hot water, good food, beauty rest. Though, in parenthesis, Christopher says that inner spring mattresses induce repose by threatening to bounce you off on the floor if you don't lie still.

"Deep South" is a happy phrase. It connotes precisely the sensation one has in driving every day farther and farther away from the brisk agitation of the North into the mellow serenity of the Southern states. Down, down, down. After all, mere depth has an intrinsic value. It conserves much that the surface forgets, and works a sea change upon it for the good of all concerned. In descending through the Carolinas we felt like divers groping toward sunken treasure of the American spirit. Peace. Poverty. Wisdom. Humor. Delay. In what book have I read lately that "slowness is beauty"? I felt

the truth of the remark as I watched a superb Negress move along the path which led to her tiny home.

There were deep forests about us too all that gentle November day, forests of the lovely Southern pine. Thousands and millions of pine trees, each one obeying a common law of growth yet different from every other. Some of them were being cut down, some were tapped for turpentine; but, in every denuded place, fresh seedlings were springing up. We remembered the statement of Daniels in *A Southerner Discovers the South*, that, so long as the Southern states have the pine tree, they need not despair.

Speaking of phrases, I should now like to protest against the inaccuracy of "Ocean Highway." That is downright dishonest. It creates in the mind of the traveler a vision of his car speeding day after day along the edge of sandy beaches in full view of tumbling waves, when, as a matter of fact, it is not until he reaches Myrtle Beach, North Carolina, that he sees the ocean at all, and then he has to leave the Highway and drive east a block or two to get a clear outlook. We parked our car here for half an hour while we walked on the sand and picked up shells. This was all we saw of the open Atlantic until we reached Florida.

But we saw plenty of inlets in South Carolina, and our road led us across many of them on astonishing bridges two or three miles long. We were not prepared for these bridges and could not get used to them. That at the entrance to Charleston brought us up short, studying it and wondering which gear

shift it required. The inverted V it inscribed against the sky looked quite unnegotiable.

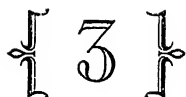
We spent the night in Charleston, not only because we reached it at a logical hour to do so, but also because we hoped it might solve our winter's problem. One of our Vermont friends goes there every year and loves it. Everybody loves Charleston. It offers much in the way of aesthetic and historic interest combined with a mild climate and delightful people. Therefore we surveyed it eagerly from the peak of its bridge.

We found it much bigger than we had expected and very smoky from belching soft-coal fires. At first sight, it looked just like any other industrial city, and, with one accord, our rustic predilections turned their four thumbs down. But we did not commit ourselves to decision until we had slept on it. Then we got into our car and drove about the old town.

Christopher's final reaction was much more favorable than mine. Though he did not want to spend this particular winter there, he did and does want to return. And, if he will take me with him, I shall be glad of a chance to correct my impression of melancholy. Perhaps, after all, that word is too explicit. Perhaps what I felt was more nearly a lack than a positive trait. A lack of reconciliation. There seemed to me something faintly embittered in Charleston, sitting among its shabby famous old houses, remembering its aristocratic past. Pride of position can easily turn into a kind of poison. But I daresay I was quite mistaken. I certainly recognized the beauty

of the narrow streets and graceful houses and churches, the gates and dooryards, the little parks, the picturesque wharves. And, for the sake of my own pride of intelligence (such as it is), I want to make another effort to feel the full charm of the place.

For the rest, at the time of our visit, a city of any kind was unwelcome to us, and it was with relief that we again turned southward through a sunny land of inlets and marshes, live oaks and pines. Since our next destination was Beaufort, we drove slowly and let our eyes drink in the quiet beauty of this unsensational part of the world.



FOR THE first time in this random narrative, I have just appropriated the word "destination." And that is significant. Not knowing where we were going, we yet had been gently coaxed along by a sort of flexible purpose, a pliant tendency, until we woke to the realization that we were on the voluntary point of arriving at Beaufort, South Carolina.

There were several reasons why we should want to come here. Two of our best-loved relatives had found their separate ways to the place and then had united in a common affection for it. But my first interest stemmed further back and from nothing more definite than a chance remark made by somebody who had not even been to Beaufort herself, who had simply heard of it. I cannot remember now what she said. I only know that, as I listened, a still small voice within me remarked: "This concerns you; don't forget."

So I put the name Beaufort away in my mind, like one of those white stones mentioned in the Bible; and I bided my time.

Meanwhile I met other people who spoke disparagingly of mud flats at ebb tide, of monotonous marshes, of "nothing at all to do." The familiar reverse side

of magic, behind which it conceals itself from those whom it does not concern. The preparation was excellent. I approached the little place, hopeful but wary, my attention poised lightly, ready for an agile discrimination between that which was and that which was not for me. In any event, I knew my reaction must be gradual and delicate.

Good fortune was ours in the fact that high tide brimmed all the channels when we arrived. The mud flats were covered and the air was fresh and sweet. As we drove into the quiet town, heading toward the water front, we perceived with a certain bewilderment that our goal apparently lay everywhere. Blue water gleamed before us, but it also beckoned to right and left, and every vista looked as wide and authentic as every other. Which was the water front? The answer did not really matter, however. The confusion was part of the magic which we now began to recognize as genuine. In a gratified silence, we found the main street and entered a restaurant for lunch.

"This is the region of what they call the Sea Islands, isn't it, Christopher?" I said as, having given our order, we sat back and waited contentedly.

"Yes," Christopher replied. "Nice phrase too, don't you think?"

"Oh, very," I answered. "Shakespeare couldn't have done better. And I suppose, as a matter of fact, we're on one of the islands now."

"We've come unto these yellow sands," agreed Christopher.

While we were eating our oyster stew, an elderly gentleman got up from another table and came to speak to us. He had very beautiful manners, grave and courteous.

"I see you are strangers," he explained his interruption. "I should like to welcome you to Beaufort and ask if there is anything I can do for you."

The words were as simple and matter-of-fact as if they had been spoken often; and so I daresay they had been in this unusual place. But in all the many towns where Christopher and I have lunched, it had never happened to us before to be thus greeted. We replied very cordially that we did not yet know our own intentions but that we were eager to feel our way into an experience which we already divined as delightful. He understood and, shaking hands with us, gave us his calling card and went away.

"Not even offering to show us around," I commented. "That's what I call intelligent tact."

The first step of the "feeling" process did not take us long. We have now traveled so much that, given any congenial material at all, we can sift it rapidly. Cruising slowly along the extension of Main Street, beside a silken sheet of water which, from its width and general air of permanence, we took to be the chief inlet of the invisible sea, we came to a pause before a big house with a rooming sign.

"That's it," I said.

"Well, since you're so sure," replied Christopher lazily, "I won't bother to get out."

In another five minutes, he had to, however, in

order to unpack the car and carry up the bags. For the room I had found was completely and cordially "it."

Large and well furnished, with twin beds and four windows and an enormous bath, it looked from its two front windows out over the shimmering water to the low shore of an island about five miles away. Its air of gracious tranquillity was partly derived from the view, but was also partly inherent. Rooms are sometimes that way. I felt that I should like to unpack entirely, consigning all my possessions to the huge closet, and settle down for the rest of my life.

Christopher agreed with my conviction that, at any rate, this was the place for our week end; but, being more cautious than I, he reserved his ultimate judgment. And, for that matter, I knew for myself that Beaufort's beauty was not the kind he wanted to paint. It was too quiet, too unaccented, too mystical—if, even in disparagement, one may venture to use that unpopular word. Therefore it was with resignation that I noted the increasing stridency of our ear, protesting against the dampness of this atmosphere.

Perhaps, anyway, it was all for the best. In one of my early books I had published a paper called "Edge of the Woods," in which I had argued that the best things in life are the most tenuous and fleeting. I had not then met Christopher, and did not really know much about the "best things in life"; but, from certain points of view, I still think the doctrine sound. At any rate, I decided to revert to it now here in Beau-

fort; and, expecting the episode to be brief, I set myself to educe from it all I could.

To this program Beaufort lent itself with complete felicity. It began by inviting me to come down and sit on the bench just across the road while Christopher went off to find a barber and get his hair cut.

I did not know till long afterwards that this particular bench was, for many winters, a favorite resting place with two people whom I love and one of whom had, at the time of our visit, just slipped away over the water which bounds our little sea island of an earth. Therefore I could not quite fathom the spell which took possession of me. It was more than the magic of "spirit of place"; there were strange undertones in it. For at least an hour I sat there, while the tide dropped slowly, the far island receded with it, the gulls swept their strong white bodies across the blue of the sky and water, and the sun shone quietly. Stillness is the right word for Beaufort, I thought. Also assurance. In quietness and in confidence it has found strength.

When Christopher came back, shorn and fragrant, he sat on the bench beside me awhile, pointing out the sandpipers, kingfishers and herons which hailed the gradual emergence of the ill-reputed mud flats. There were other birds too, unfamiliar to us. And there was a fisherman mending a net which the tide had left high and dry. Every motion of bird and man and water was unhurried and tranquil. All the time in the world was at the disposal of each one of them.

"I can't help thinking," I said at last, with a sigh

of sheer well-being, "that this is the pace the whole world ought to keep; not the mad rush which we in the North consider so efficient."

"Well," answered Christopher, noncommittal as usual, "I don't know. Come on, let's take a walk."

"Let's find the Negro quarters," I replied at once. And we both laughed.

The reason for our amusement harked back to the previous summer when the very person on whose bench we were now sitting had showed us some snapshots of Beaufort, hoping thus to entice us hither. He had succeeded in an unexpected direction. Looking at a picture of a broad grassy street, dotted with shade trees and bordered by small one-story houses, we had simultaneously declared,

"We'd like to rent one of those cottages."

"But," our friend had explained, "that's the Negro quarter."

"Can't help it," we had answered. "It looks good to us; cosy and simple and homelike. It's the kind of house we prefer."

So now we set out to find it.

But, on the way, we found many other things. Fine old colonial mansions, surrounded by lawns and gardens in which narcissi were already beginning to bloom. A strikingly picturesque church built of tabby and set in the midst of an ancient cemetery. Enormous live oaks. Tall slender pines. And in every direction sudden glimpses of water where, at the end of the street or beyond a garden, an inlet of the ocean thrust its winding way. Most of these

streams were called rivers, and one of them does have an inland source; but they were all saline, and Beaufort seemed to belong fully as much to the sea as to the land.

Some tabby ruins interested us, for we could see there the inner composition of this old indigenous building material made of oyster shells. That was the right pioneer spirit: to construct what was needed out of local resources; and the result was happy. Tabby houses are strong and comely. Their gray walls take the sunlight softly, and they harmonize with the misty atmosphere of their environment. They look much older than they are, however, and the romantic effect they produce is not strictly justified. That of the church is almost too romantic, even desolating. I should certainly hate to consign anybody I love to that dank tangled graveyard; and, though we spent a Sunday in Beaufort, we did not go to church.

The Negro quarters proved as attractive as we had hoped, and only the thought of our gem of a room reconciled us to turning away from them.

We spent three days in Beaufort, days of a stillness and beauty which I shall never forget.

We drove out to Colony Gardens, across a mile-long bridge and then, for several miles, over a road whose surface made an all too successful attempt to imitate the ripples of the sea. But we liked Colony Gardens: a group of small furnished houses, with a tennis court and adjacent golf links, well suited to the quiet people who winter there.

Also we liked the whole of Helena Island, parceled

out for the most part in the ten-acre farms which, at the close of the Civil War, were given to the Gullah Negroes. We could well believe the story of the Negro who, being offered five thousand dollars for his farm, replied, "No, thank you, suh." Human life seemed here as nearly harmonious as could be imagined. A little house just big enough for its owners, sometimes overgrown with vines, always bright with flowers; a little farm just big enough too, and fertile, bearing two crops a year; a seashore only a few steps away where fish may be caught and shellfish gathered. No wonder the South Carolina Negroes look happy.

We had read and been told that the Gullahs are a peculiarly gifted race, and we scanned their faces as closely as politeness permitted. They certainly bore themselves with great dignity. There seemed to be in and near Beaufort none of the sense of frustration and humiliation which one associates with the South. However social conditions may differ elsewhere, the Gullah Negroes of Beaufort appear as self-respecting and independent as the white folk. In fact perhaps occasionally more so; for the whole South is poor, and black people know better than white how to handle poverty.

Of course it is true that in all Negro faces there lurks a depth of melancholy; but it is not personal nor even narrowly racial. Universally human is the grief which molds a Gullah's mouth and which vibrates in his music. If this were not so, his spirituals could not make their immense appeal. We practical Nordics, busy amassing dollars and gadgets, have persuaded

ourselves that life is a strictly functional affair, and we despise as sentimental all *lacrimae rerum*. The result is that our arid eyes have to relegate their weeping (which is a natural function too) to other less sophisticated races. We shall possibly never know what a priceless boon the Negro is to us, but the leaven of his vital unashamed emotion, hid in the lump of our civilization, quickens and comforts us all.

Christopher and I had read that, in singing their traditional spirituals, the Gullah Negroes introduce strange cadences of their own invention, and we were of course eager to hear them. Therefore we jumped at a chance to attend an evening of music at a white school for Negroes on one of the islands.

Our hopeful intention had been to slip in and sit in the rear of the auditorium where we could unobtrusively watch the faces around us; and, to that end, we went early. But, to our disappointment, we were met at the entrance by one of the white teachers and escorted to the second row of seats. There was something so firm and final about this gesture that we dared not protest. Perhaps the Negroes themselves preferred the arrangement; perhaps our alien presence in their midst would hamper their singing. Certain it was that our conspicuous separateness, perched up there in front, with our backs turned to the people in whom we had hoped to lose ourselves for an hour, hampered our own enjoyment.

Not that our pleasure was thwarted. That would have been a disgrace to our intelligence. But in the music which presently began behind us, there seemed

something faintly—oh, ever so faintly—unspontaneous. These people were singing not just because they wanted to but partly because two rows of white visitors had come to hear them. There was none of that inner crooning, that undertone of melody which, unfailingly true to the beat of the rhythm, gushes out now and then in complete unpremeditation. And, to our abiding regret, there were no novel cadences. We had heard every one of these spirituals sung in precisely this manner before and most of them with more feeling.

I do not know what was the matter or whether it could have been helped. The Negro is not a naturally self-conscious creature, and he has had plenty of experience in singing before white audiences. If Carnegie Hall does not repress him, why should the auditorium of his own school? Were these particular Negroes too close to the unstimulating backs of our heads? Were they too aware of their teachers? Were they too intent on conserving their forces for a quartet and chorus from *La Bohème*? Hardly the latter, I think; for, though they made a mighty effort, they sang it very badly; and the applause they received was that which greets grammar school children after an exhibition.

Perhaps, however, it was precisely this equivocal number on the program which resolved some conflict, released some tension; for, after it was over and the quartet, descending from the platform, had merged once more in the chorus, from somewhere far back in the hall a deep voice began, "Go down, Moses."

There was a stir. Other voices fell in. A rocking motion pulsed through the packed rows. The air quickened. The walls swayed a little. "Let my people go." Over and over, with the slow gathering might of a great river, this sound of many waters swelled through the listening room; and, in recoil from what was trivial and alien to it, the soul of a grand race of human beings found release.

That was worth waiting for.

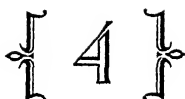
There was much in Beaufort which we did not see. But our unashamed method of traveling works thus. When, for any reason whatever, the exquisite edge of our pleasure seems in danger of blunting, we fold it up and put it away.

On Monday morning the sky was overcast and the air was chilly. With one accord and with no discussion, we packed our bags. If we had been planning to stay all winter, we should have welcomed a chance to prove ourselves no fair weather friends. But, since we were going away soon, we wanted to take with us an unclouded memory.

"You'll come back some time?" asked our kind landlady; and, "Oh, we hope so," we answered.

Beaufort itself, however, exacted no promises. It merely slipped its white stone into my hand and closed my fingers upon it.

To keep.



THE NEXT day we were in Florida.

And now what am I going to say about this most famous of all the vacation lands of our country? Glamorous realm of sunshine and ease, of relaxation and physical well-being.

Nothing at all concerning that side of it, for it did not interest me. Unless, indeed, the real truth is that it interested me too painfully, marking such a contrast between the opulent visitors and the poor residents.

I hope I am not such a Puritan as to begrudge anyone a needed vacation, or even a trip of pure superfluous pleasure. The more people get out in the sunshine, the better the whole world is. But a sharp division of classes seems to me deplorable.

I know how it works in my own Vermont. When our summer residents came modestly, asking only to share the simple life we were leading, our community was enriched. But now that they come expecting to take over the valley during the period of their sojourn, imposing their standards upon it, a cleavage has begun which not even the long winter avails to heal. There is a certain innocent word, a harmless necessary word, which has worked an insidious havoc. When the

summer people took to calling the rest of us "natives," the note of doom was struck.

Even so, Vermont is still better off than Florida; for in Florida it never seems to occur to anyone that there are any natives at all. Only hordes and hordes of tourists who, descending from the North, take possession of the hotels and invade the beaches and the shallows of the sea.

Not merely the shallows either. Boatloads of them go deep-sea fishing: a callous sport which has no excuse, since many of the fish thus caught are inedible.

"But surely," said I to a proud fisherman once, "if sport is your only object, you might release the fish after you have caught him."

"How then could I have my picture taken with him?" was the naive reply.

Florida hurt me intolerably. At Clearwater all the bridges were lined with fishermen, drawing in exquisite shimmering creatures who were then dropped on the boards and left to gasp themselves to death. A twist of the fingers could have broken their necks and made an end of their agony, but that would have been too much trouble for the so-called sportsman.

Well, I started this chapter, not knowing where it would lead me, trusting my pen to respond to the psychological method of instinctive reply. "What does Florida mean to you? Quick!" And the answer surprises me. I should have expected myself to ignore the busy beaches in favor of the deep quiet interior where there are few tourists, where certainly none but natives inhabit the small lonely houses among the

tall pines. If I were ever to come again (which, on the whole, heaven forbid!) it is here I should like to linger.

The Florida pines are very graceful and stately. Our own New England white pines have a more rugged nobility, but the Southern pines are more varied and mobile. Yet in height and general contour they are uniform. Through them the low land aspires toward the low sky in lines of flowing beauty which, like fountains, fall even as they rise. They are romantic and mysterious.

So are the rivers. Different from any other streams in the world, they are very silent and secret, moving imperceptibly between their low wooded banks, often overhung darkly, always dark in color themselves, brimming, inscrutable. Sometimes a white heron stands on one leg in the shallows, sometimes a turtle scurries to a splash, but generally the rivers are as lonely as they are mute.

There are blue herons as well as white, and both birds are beautiful creatures. I dared not inquire whether any game laws protect them. Neither did I think best to investigate the plight of the wild ducks which winter on the inland lakes. But when I got home I made haste to join the Audubon Society.

I wish it had been possible for us to know some of the people living and working in the Florida interior. Above all, I wish we had a firsthand knowledge of the Seminole Indians retreating further and further within the Everglades, guarding the hopeless remnant of their old tribal independence. I fear such knowledge

would not have enhanced my impression of Florida, but it would have given me something definite to cogitate.

It was not our business at present, however. We were in search of a warm dry climate, and Florida was damp and cold. As a matter of record, my journal reports that on our first morning in the state, I donned my winter coat and opened the heater in the car; on our second morning, I wore a winter dress underneath the coat. This was of course "unusual." But the dampness was habitual. Therefore we decided to spend a week in Clearwater, where we had relatives, and then to push on.

In spite of the bridge "sport" mentioned above, we liked Clearwater better than any other Florida town. For one thing, it is more simple than most of the winter resorts, inviting a quieter group of people; and, perhaps for that very reason, it seems more solid and genuine. Its "natives" were real enough.

Yet I daresay most of the latter were not born in Florida at all. The outstanding native I have in mind hailed from Ohio. She was head waitress in the boardinghouse where Christopher and I spent our week. A small, very agile person, with straight-cut gray hair, snapping eyes behind spectacles, a comical carriage, a lively tongue, she dominated her circle simply by entering it. Comical is the right word for her. After we had been there a day, it began to amuse us to watch the faces of newcomers as "Miss Jenny" came in from the kitchen and forged across the dining-room, her feet moving swiftly yet stiffly, her head thrown back,

her face intent on her goal. It was always the same kind of look she called forth, surprised and refreshed and delighted, a perfect tribute to the emergence of An Individual from the drab crowd of humanity. "Hello, Dynamo!" said one of the regular boarders one day as he came in to dinner; and Christopher and I exchanged glances of applause.

During the rush hours, Miss Jenny was too busy to say more than a salty word or two in reply to some rallying comment; but at breakfast or at a late supper, she was often voluble. And then her laughter was so enlivening that we saved up all the jokes we heard and all the funny things we saw to repeat to her. I remember that she shared our appreciation of the unconscious, equivocal humor conveyed by a signboard: "The Divinity Nut Shop. Meek's Divinity in Boxes."

In repartee she was unfailing. Lightning swift was the rapier play of her verbal thrust and parry. Pausing on her way to the kitchen, with a plate in one hand, a pitcher in the other, she would cap any remark made by Christopher, then vanish with a twinkling smile. She and Christopher became fast friends.

Though humor and energy are the traits that chiefly characterize our forever enduring memory of Miss Jenny, I am sure that she had a fund of stalwart tenderness. We came in one evening to find her sitting with her cousin, the proprietress, in a corner of the otherwise empty living-room. They were both tired. The cousin was lying back in a deep armchair. When she started to rise, we protested; and when they both

asked us to sit down, we did so gladly. For the next fifteen minutes we heard fragments of a life story which will also endure in our memories. It was common enough, I suppose. Early bereavement and ill health; the breaking up of home; exile and poverty. But good cheer and good courage, steadfast loyalty. Hard work always, the harder now for the mounting years and the economic uncertainty of the whole world. Perseverance, however, always too. And, mercifully, humor. When, groping for some reassurance (which had not been asked of me!), I found nothing better than the banal suggestion that there must be a certain real pleasure in keeping a houseful of people well-fed and happy, they glanced at each other mirthfully and then laughed aloud.

"You don't know what you're saying," they forgave me. "Miss Bangs's coffee is always too weak and Mrs. Stone's too strong. Miss Roberts hates Mr. Wilson's radio and threatens to move away. Mr. Wilson himself is annoyed because when there's a good program coming in well, Mrs. Snow, who rooms next to him, not only leaves her door open but opens his on the sly. Mr. Simmons raises—well, hell" (this was Miss Jenny speaking) "if his favorite place at the table isn't always reserved for him; but he keeps irregular hours, and we can't spend all our time shooing transients away from what is of course the best seat in the room. Every single person likes or hates a different vegetable from every other," ("So that's why you serve a whole marketful every meal,"

I interpolated) "but they all want strictly homemade pie, and that means a lot of work."

"Do you make them yourself?" I inquired.

The proprietress nodded. Then she raised her eyes to a landscape in oils hanging on the opposite wall.

"That's what I began my life by making," she said, "what I always expected and still want to make."

It was a simple statement, uttered quite matter-of-factly, with not even a sigh, but it brought Christopher's eyes and mine sharply together.

I do not remember what comment we made, but it is at least to my credit that I refrained from quoting George Herbert's maddening couplet about sweeping a room.

There are of course all kinds of tragedies in the world; and perhaps, if everybody's particular kind didn't seem to him the worst ever, it wouldn't be his tragedy. But to be gently born and bred to the vocation of painting and then to have to make pies all your life for a lot of thankless people is surely a difficult doom. I hope the thwarted artist did find a little pleasure in the fact that, no matter how her boarders differed about her coffee, they were unanimous in the praise of her pie. And I'm sure her honest soul told her that Christopher and I spoke truth when we pronounced her whole table admirable.

We put in our time very pleasantly during our week's sojourn. With our relatives we drove every day to the beach and picked up seashells or fed the gulls. We explored the neighboring towns. Of these, Tarpon Springs was the one we liked best

because of its sponge fisheries. Christopher even entertained a transient notion of going out with the fleet, and we both wished we might be here at Epiphany when the ancient Greek ceremony of blessing the boats is held.

For the rest, we found one town very much like another.

But here of course we are open to the charge of ignorance and superficiality. Candidly I admit that we have no right to pass judgment on Florida or even to express an opinion about it. Our progress so far this winter resembled that of two browsers at a book-stall, looking for something to read. Book after book we opened, fluttered its pages a little, read a paragraph here and there, then returned it to the stock. There could be no real value in any review we might make. Granting all this, however, we hope there may be some significance in a cursory impression. For, after all, lightly skimming a book does give one its salient outlines and its quality.

With apologies then and an avowal of readiness to stand corrected, I state my conclusion that the intrinsic life of Florida lies deep within it, beside those secret rivers where the herons wait; and that the ephemeral life of the coasts is shallow and rather shoddy, however remunerative. Which is quite as it should be. The outer aspect of an organism should feed and protect the inner.

Here again, however, I am probably quite mistaken, for the coastal industries may keep all their profits for themselves. The citrus fruit ranches have

to do so. Everywhere we went, we found roadside stands offering large glasses of juice for five cents and bags and baskets of fruit for twenty-five or thirty. Superlative grapefruit and oranges too. The season had been too good. It did not seem likely that such piles and piles of golden globes could ever find a market big enough to consume them all. What then? Sheer waste and heavy financial loss. Like all the rest of our country and most of the world, Florida was in an economic muddle, producing enough fruit to feed millions of hungry mouths, yet finding the slip between cup and lip irremediable.

Our ear was so outraged by Florida that we had to hunt up a doctor for treatment, and it was in his waiting-room that we received our next impulse.

"Why," inquired another patient, scraping acquaintance while she waited her turn, "why don't you go to San Antonio?"

"Is that a good climate?" we countered.

"Marvelous. One of the best in the country for all kinds of sinus trouble. I spent a winter there once and never felt so well in my life."

"Warm and dry?" we repeated our formula.

"Absolutely," she stated. "With floods of sunshine. I'd go again in a minute."

Back in our room, we got out our road maps. The distance from Clearwater to San Antonio was about twelve hundred miles. Rather far to go on the chance of success. But we had to go somewhere; and, by this time, mere distance did not seem so important to us as it had seemed back in Vermont. Moreover,

our adventurous spirit was stirring. We had never seen the country which lies between Florida and Texas. As for the expense, when people travel as we do, they don't spend much more than they would spend at home. The nullified coal bill partly covers the lodging, meals must be eaten and paid for wherever we are, and, even at home, gas and oil are consumed by our car every day.

So we packed our bags, said good-by to our relatives and our new friends with real regret, to Florida itself with very little, and once more took the road.

{ 5 }

A WESTWARD direction is, just in itself, always inspiring to us; and this particular trek proved very interesting.

We took off from Tallahassee where we spent our first night in an excellent motor camp set in a grove of tall pines. The days were now so short that we got up and dressed before sunrise, watching the morning star and the dawn behind the feathery tops of the trees.

Then, after a good breakfast, we drove all the morning and part of the afternoon along the northern shore of the Gulf of Mexico. It was in a heavenly mood that day, shimmering with every shade of blue and green. Turquoise, sapphire, ultramarine, cobalt, azure, jade, emerald, malachite, aquamarine. All flowing together and shaken apart by the pulsations of the tide. A more regal robe of color no sea ever wore. And the sand dunes and beaches which lined it were whiter than ermine. The air was still pretty cold, but the sun shone brilliantly.

Expecting to spend the next night in Mobile, we made a mistake in passing up an attractive motor court some fifteen miles east of the city, and were punished by having to thread our way through a

hideous tangle of downtown streets, reeking with smoke and grime, at a late afternoon hour when they were at their worst. Nor did the motor court where we finally stopped make amends. However, it was clean and cheap, and its location afforded us our first experience of eating in an "All Night Diner." For some reason, we had heretofore avoided these ubiquitous restaurants. This one proved quite satisfactory, in a jocular, hail-fellow fashion, and it gave us a good supper and breakfast as well as a novel atmosphere. The signs above the long counter amused us. "Hamburger, shrimpburger, cheeseburger." "Eat here or we'll both starve." "Eat here and keep your wife for a pet." But our sense of humor failed us before a large painting of a palm-fringed Gulf which bore the legend, "Vas you efer in Zinzinatti?" We could not imagine what it meant, unless possibly to point a geographical contrast.

The Gulf was not quite so bewitching as we drove along it the next morning, and our attention was thus released for observation of the famous resorts of Biloxi and Pass Christian. Very pleasant we thought them, though not abounding in obvious interest. Perhaps the people who live in the large comfortable houses or come down here for the winter ask nothing better than to sit on the benches which border the Gulf, looking out over the water and basking in the sun. But the more probable truth is that a quietly active social life goes on in the two decorous towns.

The high spot of the day was of course New Orleans. And here even my shamelessly sketchy pen

pauses abashed at the prospect of making any comment at all on this famous old city in which we spent exactly three hours! We did get its flavor, however, and printed on our memories some vivid pictures which we are not likely to forget.

We began by parking our car on the edge of the Vieux Carré and taking to our feet. Since the hour was lunch time, our natural objective would seem to have been one of the well-known restaurants. But people whose traveler's checkbooks are slender think twice before spending money on expensive food; and we decided to walk around first, thus getting a general idea of the quarter and perhaps lighting on a modest coffee shop. Luck was with us. In one of the old buildings we found a small café recently opened, and there we ate a fifty-cent luncheon fit for Napoleon.

The young Negress who served us awed me a little with her dignified aloofness; but, when she brought our dessert, she relayed a message from her mistress: "Please don't go away until you have seen our court."

A few minutes later, the mistress herself came forward: a young Southern woman with an eager face and a capable manner.

"I saw you were strangers," she explained, "and I thought you might like to see our court. It really sums up New Orleans."

"Is this what we should call in the North your old homestead?" I asked.

"No," she replied. "I wish it were. But then perhaps I shouldn't be quite so crazy about it. My sister and I rented this room and opened a coffee shop about

a year ago. We've been very successful." She smiled, not at all as if she claimed any merit but simply rejoiced in good fortune. "The owner of the house has been kind to us and, little by little, has extended our privileges. We now have pretty much the run of the whole place."

A big place and a long run, we thought as we followed her back into the courtyard and there saw other courts opening in three directions and balconied stories rising above. A running jump out of the twentieth century into the eighteenth.

We could not have made this abrupt recession in time at a more fortunate moment. For most revivals of the past are sterile affairs, interesting only to the historical intelligence. A "restored" house is generally more dead than a ruin. This huge old mansion, however, in mid-process of restoration, was today quickened not only by the stir of unfinished renewal but also by preparations for Christmas. A quaint old crèche stood in a corner. From the wrought-iron railing of the second-floor balcony hung bright rugs and shawls. Greens were strewn over the tiled pavement and a tree stood ready for trimming. There was everywhere a vibrant animation which was of the very essence of the joyous season, Noel.

As we stood watching, a man and a woman came out of a door which opened on the balcony and added a scarf to the cascade of color flowing over the rail.

"They live up there," our hostess explained. "The second floor has been made into small apartments."

Did her voice convey a hint? At any rate, we took it, and glanced at each other. But then Christopher touched an ear. Nobody could call the mouth of the Mississippi warm and dry. Some other time perhaps.

Before we left the building, we wandered into another courtyard, bright with grass and flowers, accented with old pillars and figures, a sunny cheerful spot. Then we wrote our names in the guest-book and said good-by to our hostess, thanking her for a brief experience in old New Orleans which would prove a permanent treasure of our memories.

It was now half-past three. I suppose most travelers would have spent the rest of the day in the Vieux Carré and the night in a local hotel. But Christopher and I like to travel on what we call a nugget basis. From the wide shore of any given occasion we pick up one typical shell or pebble and take it away with us. This gives play to the imagination which, surveying the nugget later, recreates the original setting. In the old eighteenth-century house we had lived for a few minutes the gay colorful life of early New Orleans preparing for its annual Christmas festivities; and we did not want to overlay the impression. So, after making once more the circuit of the Vieux Carré, we retrieved our car and drove away.

Another of our shocking defaults is a repeated, persistent failure to appreciate the Mississippi River. This is an acute mortification to us and we do not try to explain it. We simply confess it with regret. So far, on our six transcontinental journeys, we have crossed the Father of Waters at a different place each

time, hoping always to escape from our inhibition and arrive at a right sense of the grandeur which we know to be there. And at New Orleans we more nearly succeeded than anywhere else. The sun was low in the sky and shone right down the river, curving from the west as we met it at the Huey Long Bridge. There was majesty in that wide track of gold flowing to the sea. But perhaps the name Huey Long defeated our admiration. At any rate, though we tried hard, driving slowly and gazing earnestly, we could not see anything which other rivers do not possess and some of them in fuller measure.

In Louisiana we drove late and far, hunting for a place in which to spend the night. Previous experience had taught us that the lodgings in this state are not apt to be very good; and, fearing to pause in any of the small towns through which we passed, we kept on and on and on. Finally darkness overtook us in Morgan City.

"Guess we'll just have to stop here," said Christopher.

"Yes," I acceded; "but let's find a hotel. *The* hotel. The best will probably be none too good."

It certainly took some finding. We saw its electric sign in the distance and drove hopefully towards it, only to come up against a barricade: "Road Closed." So then we made a circuit of the block, intending to approach from the other direction, and again were stopped: "Road Closed."

"But," reasoned Christopher, "this is absurd. No town would cut off all access to its best hotel, and no

hotel would let it do so. There must be some entrance."

He parked the car and got out to investigate.

"There's an alleyway," he reported, returning. "It seems to run through the middle of the block just behind the hotel. Pretty narrow, but I guess we can make it. Let's try anyway."

"Sporty proposition to turn around if you have to, or even to back out!" I suggested unkindly when, two minutes later, we were cautiously threading our way through a veritable needle's eye of a passage between imminent back walls. The headlights of our car, insolently picking out ash cans and garbage pails, looked as out of place as a locomotive in a mouse hole, and I felt embarrassed by our sheer irrelevance.

"Going to get wedged pretty soon anyway," answered Christopher.

But he was wrong there. The alleyway widened and opened out into a back yard across which loomed the bulk of the hotel; and presently an astonished porter came running to us.

"Yes, suh," he said. "Yes, dis de hotel. Oh, yes, suh, der's rooms enuf."

He grinned as he took our bags.

The proprietor, however, did not crack a smile.

"A nice thing to maroon me like this!" he complained. "Just when I've got my house made over and fixed up for the season. You can have any rooms you want. In fact, you can have them all."

The result was that Christopher and I, alone in the big very pleasant hotel which we had tracked down

and unearthed, occupied a suite of rooms and spent one of the most comfortable nights of our trip.

The next day we drove through sugar-cane country and, mindful of our Vermont maple-sugar harvest, became much interested in the gathering of this similar, yet dissimilar, crop.

Instead of bare groves of trees glinting with pails, here were open fields of tall cane. Instead of a huge vat on runners, here was a cradle-shaped wagon. The workers, instead of hurrying from tree to tree, moved steadily down the rows, cutting and trimming the slender stalks with one hand, gathering them into a bundle in the other arm, then lifting them into the cradle. But the two ultimate processes were identical.

Pausing before a distillery, we asked if we might inspect it. Perhaps the proprietor noticed our license plate, and caught the relevant idea. At any rate, he was hospitable and led us all over the rumbling, dripping, steaming edifice. We saw the bundles of stalks riding in from the wagon to the hopper, we saw them thrown to the grinders where they tossed for a few minutes, then yielded their fibers to pour forth a river of brown juice. This flowed into the boilers which seethed and muttered and growled until exactly the right moment for decanting. To determine this accurate split second of fulfilment was the sole job of a worker who, with gauge and thermometer, stood at unremitting attention. After being removed from the boiler, the syrup was stirred by great paddles which bore little resemblance to the rotating spoons of Vermonters at a "sugaring off," but had the same effect.

The final product was poured into bags, some of it to be used as brown sugar, some of it to be sent to a refinery. Meantime, the pulp, thoroughly drained and pounded, became fuel for the engines: a complete rounding out of a circle of utility.

"Don't they get gummed up?" I shouted above the roar of the pistons as they spewed out a glistening leakage which ran down their jaws and arms.

"Have to be emptied and washed every ten days," the proprietor yelled in reply.

But how, I wondered? Not all my experience with sticky dishes in our kitchen sink at home could remind me of a process by which those intricate and reeking machines might be cleansed.

That night we spent in Houston; and there we again proved the truth of a conviction which we hold but seldom obey: there simply is no telling about motor courts. We took all kinds of trouble to hunt one up in Houston because it bore an attractive name and had been recommended to us. Fully half a dozen other courts tempted us in passing, but the only comment we made on them was to the effect that the superlative court for which we were searching evidently set a local standard of excellence. Repeatedly Christopher stopped and got out to ask questions. Again and again we retraced our way. But, when we finally arrived, though we said, "At last!" and made haste to secure a cottage, we presently glanced at each other ruefully. Almost all the courts we had spurned looked more inviting than this.

However, the little house was comfortable enough;

and, since it contained a kitchenette, we decided to have our supper at home. While Christopher unpacked the car, I went to a near-by café to purchase some provisions.

Here, waiting for my order, I became an inadvertent but highly interested spectator of a brief episode in a domestic drama.

The outer door opened and from the street a man entered, dragging by the arm a highly reluctant young woman. That he had been drinking was evident from his unsteady gait.

"Louis!" he shouted furiously. "Louis! Where are you? Come here."

"He's busy just now," said the café proprietor, standing behind the counter. "I'm afraid you can't see him."

He glanced at the young woman quickly and then more briefly at me.

"But I've got to see him," the other man bellowed. "And so's she. That's the damned point: she's got to see him. Louis! Come here, I tell you. Come here."

"Better come, Louis," the proprietor said quietly over his shoulder; and, white as his apron, his eyes very large and dark, a young man emerged from an inner room. The swift look which flickered between him and the woman was eloquent.

"Now!" said the drunken man, speaking with elaborate deliberation and standing back in order that the woman might have the floor, "here he is, here's your chance; talk to him, sweetheart. Oh, you are so sweet!" he mocked her with heartbroken irony.

"But I've nothing to say to him," the poor girl murmured, twisting her hands in distress.

"Nothing to say to him!" The man's tone was one of outrage, blended with suave amusement. "That's really funny, you know, considering how much you had to say last evening. Sweet! Oh, you were so sweet!"

That it was real tragedy which I was glimpsing I never have had any doubt. Pain and humiliation, wrath, love, hatred: all were only too evident. But beauty was there too, a strange loveliness which could not have existed without the bitterness. The anguish of the repeated "Oh, you are so sweet!" was more haunting than the irony. She was indeed sweet; both men thought so, and in the knowledge their suffering hearts were enriched. While she herself, priestess and victim, wrung a harsh sort of grandeur from the unwelcome fruit she held in her locked fingers. How the story ended, I shall of course never know. I do not even know the outcome of the immediate episode; for, before it was over, my purchases were handed to me and, in simple human decency, I hastened to remove myself. But I felt as if, in those few startled minutes, I had looked deep into the maelstrom of human life and had seen something which silenced my occasional speculations concerning the nature of good and evil.

The sun was still shining the next day, and we headed for San Antonio very hopefully. Our winter's goal was in sight. But, whatever the prospect, we found the intermediate stages irksome. Texas is too

big. Since our Republic prides itself on being a melting pot, I wonder if it might not be a good plan occasionally to dissolve all the state boundaries and draw them afresh. A more equable division of scenery might ensue and a relief from the monotony of driving hour after hour and day after day through strictly uniform regions. For each state differs from every other in roadbeds and road signs and wayside architecture.

Far be it from me, however, to complain of the Texas roads. They are admirable.

Towards noon a road sign aroused us from the stupor of our progress by striking an unexpected note. "Eagle Lake. Bird Sanctuary."

"Lake?" queried Christopher, putting on the brake and gazing around in bewilderment.

"Sanctuary!" I added, with the fervor which that beautiful word always stirs in me.

"Let's find it," we agreed.

This was not easy. We found the road which led to it, and carefully checked the stated distance on our speedometer; but nothing in the landscape advertised the presence of a lake, and, if it had not been for a passing car which stopped long enough to direct us, we should never have thought of turning in through a gateway marked "For Club Members Only."

"Did you ever hear of a sanctuary that was also a club?" I inquired guilelessly as we proceeded towards a large house beyond which we now perceived a line of water.

"Well," answered Christopher slowly, as a gun

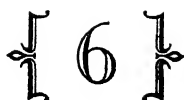
popped in the near distance, "I don't know. I guess maybe we've made another of our childlike mistakes."

Two minutes later, there was no doubt about this; and, whatever might be the function of the small body of water lying before us, the geyser which boiled up within me was a thing of wrath and scorn.

Sanctuary! A game preserve!

It is of course an honestly debatable point whether hunting and fishing are not wholesome and innocent; but to pretend one thing and mean another is of the essence of hell. The guns which exploded about that Texas "sanctuary," as we stood by the lake a minute and then hastened to re-enter our car, spoke with the accent of fiends.

As if in accord with this episode, the Texas sky was overcast when we returned to the highway; and, for the rest of the day we drove through a dreary cold gray atmosphere. At about half-past four we reached San Antonio.



WHEN I SAY that, in spite of everything, we admire San Antonio, I commit an act of faith of which I am rather proud. For "everything" was quite a plenty.

To begin with, our car took an instant dislike to the place and behaved accordingly. In the thick of the Sunday afternoon crowd in the Mexican quarter, it stalled definitively. This was vastly perplexing to us. We had never owned a temperamental car before and did not know how to deal with sheer prejudice unbiased by machinery. There was nothing wrong with the engine. After pulling out choke and throttle in turn and grinding away at the starter until he feared he would run down his battery, Christopher got out and lifted the hood.

"Flooded now, of course," he admitted, "but otherwise O.K. We'll just have to wait."

With the help of two or three very attentive bystanders, he pushed the car to the curb and resumed his seat.

By this time we were conspicuous. Our first failure to respond to the green light at a congested crossing had brought a tumult of horns about our ears, and passing pedestrians had paused to glare at us. So stimulating to a jittery car! But as soon as our help-

lessness was recognized, we became only a regrettable rock in the stream of traffic which continued to flow around and all but over us. I daresay we looked self-conscious, sitting there in our front seat, doing nothing. We certainly felt so.

I wonder if any philosopher, writing of the illusory nature of time, has ever selected as an example of static eternity the period of waiting required by a flooded motor car. Christopher himself has never possessed any sense of clock time whatever; a minute is always to him as long or as short as it seems. Therefore I, with my more mundane awareness, had all I could do to restrain his hand from the throttle and his foot from the starter at the end of thirty seconds. He utterly refused to believe that ten minutes had not elapsed. Finally I was obliged to produce my watch and time him by it. But in this the folly was mine rather than his; for ten minutes, fifteen or twenty minutes meant nothing to our car. In vain did the starter whirl and the accelerator pump. "I am a Vermonter," the car declared, "and I do not choose to run."

What happened in the end, I do not know; nor does Christopher; nor, I suspect, does anyone. Among the many passers-by who glanced at us curiously, a Mexican lad by and by put his head in at the window.

"Plenty of gas, I see," he remarked. "Do you mind if I take a look under the hood?"

What he saw when he did this, he failed to divulge; and Christopher, watching him closely, could not observe any explicit action on his part. A rap or two

with a small hammer, a tentative twist of a screw. Magic, I think. Or else blarney. Perhaps, being brought up among burros, Mexicans instinctively understand the mechanics of balkiness. At any rate, when Christopher clambered into his seat and once more stepped on the starter, the engine turned over with a murmur of sweetness and light which entirely disavowed all previous obstinacy; and our departure was so swift that I barely had time to thrust some coins into the Mexican's hand. Moreover, the next day, the entire force of a garage, concentrating on our engine, reported that there was no reason why it should have stalled.

Our San Antonio destination was a motor court which had been recommended to us as outstanding in its class; and, attaining it finally on that Sunday afternoon, we found it a haven of comfort.

It lay on the fringe of the city, near the largest park, and occupied an entire block. In fact it was a small town in itself, laid out in parallel streets bordered by uniform cottages. Trees shaded it here and there, grass plots and flower beds softened the angles, chairs and benches invited an outdoor repose. The establishment included an office with an assembly room, a drugstore, a restaurant, a grocery, a barber shop, a tailor's shop, a laundry. The cottages were more complete in equipment than any we had ever occupied. Tired in body and spirit, we entered our little temporary home and looked about it with grateful relief. Easy chairs, a floor lamp, attractive furniture, a separate dining-room, a kitchen contain-

ing a stove and a sink and two cupboards full of dishes. An electric refrigerator too, with ice cubes ready waiting in it. We unpacked our recalcitrant car, put it in a garage where it could take plenty of time to resolve its mysterious complex, and ourselves subsided into quietude.

We stayed here a week and, although at the time (since it rained every day) we found the experience rather irksome, I now look back upon it with pleasure as at least affording us a glimpse into a heretofore unfamiliar aspect of American life. Our neighbors in the motor court were, for the most part, not transients like us, but winter residents. They had come from all over the United States. But just why, we wondered? They did not seem to have any local interests or occupations, or ever to do anything except sit around. Perhaps that was the answer, however. They had already done so much in their various parts of this country which makes such a fetish of doing, that merely to sit still on a bench was enough for them now. It is, I suppose, even possible that the meagerness of the view from the row of chairs on the terrace was restful to their tired eyes. At any rate, they looked as contented as so many Buddhas, and I observed them with a sort of worried admiration.

For the truth was that I myself had frequently thought that to do nothing was a personal ideal which I desired to fulfill. The very word "nothing" had (and still has) to me wonderful connotations of wisdom and felicity. So that I recoiled in dismay from

the mortifying discovery that to do nothing in San Antonio did not please me in the least.

What was the matter, I wondered, trying to give myself over to a tranquil awareness of life on the motor court terrace? And what should I do about it? (There it was again, the slogan of my epoch and nation: do.) Little by little it dawned upon me that the discipline of self-knowledge is as good a result of a journey as the expansion which comes from a knowledge of other people, and that sheer endurance has a definite value. Frankly, I was bored to death in San Antonio. Very well, I would endure boredom and thus fortify myself in a new dimension. For I am never bored at home.

This meant of course that I was homesick, and there again I faced a music which I presently found inspiring. To travel two thousand miles in order to savor the sweetness of the very place one has left may seem a ridiculous business; but human beings are ridiculous. And, no matter how absurdly arrived at, there was real beatification to us in the thought of our Vermont home as we sat killing time in our Texas motor court. Again and again we rehearsed to each other its snowbound and firelit delights.

Why did we kill time, however? Why did we linger at all in a place which failed to conform to our needs? There were three reasons. One concerned our traveler's checkbook which required re-filling in order that we might extend our journey. A bank draft had to be put through. Another concerned our poor ear, so outraged by San Antonio's capping

the climax of weather that it was, as Christopher expressed the situation, thoroughly up on itself now and clamored for treatment. The third sprang from our realization that the city was far more likable than it appeared, and we wanted to explore it. Therefore we made the best between-showers use we could of our week.

We began by taking a drive in the country. This was partly because we thought the city itself could be understood better if we had some knowledge of its environment, partly because we wanted to make perfectly sure that a certain advertised "scenic loop" did not tempt Christopher's brush. If paintable landscape lay close at hand and the promised warm dry climate reasserted itself, we might after all remain in San Antonio.

But that scenic loop conducted us back to the city in a state of complete bewilderment. Where could we have missed the scenery? We had certainly kept our eyes open and used them industriously. Did we take a wrong turn? Did we not drive far enough? Had we not better try again?

"No," said Christopher thoughtfully, "I think it was that group of hillocks. You remember them? About ten miles back. Very pretty of course, but . . .

"Well," he continued, "I suppose every vista of earth and sky is scenic, and only stupid people insist that it must be humped up before it's worth looking at."

"On the other hand," I argued, "wouldn't you expect a region to take special pride in its own par-

ticular kind of scenery? Now this"—we were still far enough out in the suburbs to look across the open plains—"this is the glory of Texas. Why call attention to a small irrelevant sample of southern Connecticut dropped here accidentally?"

"Anyway," Christopher stated, "I didn't come all the way from the Green Mountains to paint mole-hills. Let's go see the Alamo."

That was another story, the indigenous story of Texas, and we found it extremely interesting. Surprising too at the outset, for the ancient edifice stands in the heart of the modern city and the new buildings around it make it look older than it is. Moreover, in my careless ignorance of many details of early American history, I was unprepared for the ecclesiastical aspect of a structure widely renowned as a fort. But of course! A moment's reflection reminded me that, whatever they may have done later, the first explorers of the Southwest set the primal seal of religion on the wilderness. Time enough (and with no long delay either) to follow up the cross with the sword. The original Alamo was a link in the chain of missions lying across the continent from San Diego to St. Augustine.

As such, I entered it eagerly, hoping to recapture some glimpse of the only phase of our national history which I find wholly gratifying. Those Spanish padres were superb. They came as conquerors not for themselves and not even for their earthly so much as their heavenly king. With a courage and fortitude surpassing that of the soldiers because less dependent on

artificial protection, they tucked up their robes and strapped on their sandals in order to negotiate stretches of desert and mountain which even the mounted horsemen found difficult. Doubtless they were autocratic and not always very intelligent. They did not understand that the Indians already possessed a religion which meant a great deal to them, and that they could hardly be expected to jump at the chance to embrace an alien faith. But their sternness was purely moral and spiritual. In all physical matters, benevolence prompted their footsteps and kindness sprang from their hands. This brief early heritage of the social life of America is worth cherishing. Even more so than that bequeathed us by the Pilgrim Fathers, for the latter came here to save their own souls, whereas the padres came to save the Indians.

Unfortunately, however, the beautiful episode was short-lived. Since the mission buildings were sturdy, intended for the protection of the little family of priests and neophytes, the conquistadores soon began using them as forts. And then of course their secular function more and more encroached on their spiritual ideal. If it were not for its outer aspect, one would never dream that the Alamo had ever been a church. Stepping through its carved doorway, one enters an interior completely dominated and permeated by military glory. Flags and cannon and ammunition, cases of heroic souvenirs, bullet marks, old documents, all combine to tell the story of which San Antonio is most proud: that of the battle between one hundred

and eighty Americans and twenty-five hundred Mexicans under Santa Anna.

Well, I certainly hold no brief for the cruel Santa Anna, and I hope I can feel the thrill of sheer courage as keenly as anyone; but I wish the old slogan, "Remember the Alamo!" might have retained some echoes of an earlier memory which owed its significance to the ancestors of the very Mexicans who fought to recover a part of their fatherland. Patriotism for patriotism, that of the Mexicans was older and deeper rooted.

The Spanish Governor's palace is not far from the Alamo; and, in visiting it, one returns to an earlier day than that of American influence. The restoration is admirable. Not enough furniture remained to fill the old rooms as they used to be; but that very lack is an advantage, for a certain sketchiness leaves the imagination freer than a complete working out of details. "Is this, or is this not, a museum?" I wondered as we entered; and, hoping that it was not, my fancy set to work.

The result was that I had a vivid realization of the meager crudity of that bygone period which is apt to seem to us so romantic. No pomp or ceremony could ever have prevailed in these small dark rooms where the affairs of the province were administered. The Governor's table was not so large as a modern office desk, his chair of state was puny and looked uncomfortable. There was only one bedroom in evidence, and the supposition seemed clear that the whole gubernatorial family slept in the same room and

washed in the same pint-cup basin. Perhaps other apartments were once available up the stone stairs which now lead to an empty low-roofed attic. For of course the Governor must have had many visitors. But the impression was that of domestic limitation in a harsh and hostile wilderness where even a single bedroom was a regal luxury. Only in the patio behind the austere banquet hall did the early ménage seem to have let itself go a little in flowers and vines and fruit trees, in pergolas, birds and butterflies. I suppose the family spent most of its time out here in the sunshine which my hardy faith still believes in as characteristic of San Antonio.

It was however on Mission Road that Christopher and I first felt our liking for the city take definite shape.

We had of course not been ignorant of the mission churches here, but no one had ever told us how admirable they are. Much more so, it now seemed to us, than those in California, for the Texas missions have never ceased to function as Christian churches. Governments fought and bickered, rose and fell, populations came and went; the San Antonio missions continued imperturbably to celebrate their masses and minister to the faithful of whatever color or race. They have had their share of disaster, and some of them are now in partial ruin, but their doors have never been closed nor their altars untended. And of late years a loyal group of Texans has set about the business of repairing them. One of them in particular, San José de Aguayo, is in process of complete recon-

struction: a work of love and of historic feeling which cannot be too highly praised.

We arrived at San José just in time to join a straggling party which was about to be personally conducted by an official guide. This was unfortunate, for very few guides dispense to their hearers anything but parrot talk. However, the old church spoke for itself quite effectively through the beauty of tower and doorway, rose window and cloister arch; and we were already familiar with the legend about the Spanish sculptor who, having lost his sweetheart, came to America and decorated this church in her honor. Rose was her name and roses are the flowers carved around the beautiful window. Moreover, although Mary was the Virgin name of the figure above the main doorway, she is a copy in sculpture of the painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, the Lady who caused roses to bloom in the desert in order to convince a skeptical bishop that she had really appeared to a poor Indian boy. Surely it was by intention rather than coincidence that this charming motif was echoed in this gracious church. Yet I think I remember hearing that another dull bishop objected to the expression of profane as over against sacred love, and excused the Spanish sculptor from the rest of his task.

As we turned away from the church, our interest gratified but by no means appeased, we saw a woman standing at the gateway. She did not waylay us; she simply met our eyes. And when we hesitated, she said, "Would you care to see the old granary?" There

was all the difference in the world between her tone and that of the official guide. "We'd love to!" we declared.

Then, for the next hour, the miracle of restoration was fulfilled on its spiritual as well as its physical side. Talking quietly but ardently, the slender self-appointed custodian of the oldest part of the mission led us about the group of buildings which comprised the original chapel and the storerooms, kitchen and refectory. We agreed with her that the chapel was a finer specimen of religious architecture than the church, and wondered how the padres could have brought themselves to abandon it. We admired the millstones and ovens, the looms where the Indians wove their blankets, the huge watertight baskets used for cooking and storing, the samples of early pottery. Finally we made a circuit of the old compound, now fully restored as it used to be: a wide area, dotted with well-sweeps and shade trees and completely enclosed by small adobe houses set solidly wall to wall. Here lived the Indian neophytes. An idyllic existence it must have been, with its taproot in religion and all its branches rejoicing in a measure of security and simple well-being seldom achieved by humanity. No wonder it couldn't last! But that it could ever have been conceived and carried out is heartening to remember.

At the side of the woman who thus evoked the past for us, a large black dog came and went, and it was evident that the relation between mistress and pet was intimate.

"This is Topsy," we were presently told. "She's

quite famous. You may possibly have read about her. For the last year or so, she's been bringing me one-dollar bills from some hoard she's discovered, and—"

But we interrupted her: "So it was true!"

Before our eyes glowed an immediate picture of our Vermont living-room on a winter evening, with Christopher on one side of the lamp and me on the other reading aloud what we considered an obviously faked newspaper story about a dog who contributed handsomely to a restoration fund from a secret cache.

"Yes," Topsy's mistress continued, "she has now brought me one hundred and fifty dollars, and, though we've watched her and followed her, we still don't know where she gets it. We've opened a Savings Bank account in her name. She had a litter of puppies a few months ago, and we had no trouble in finding good homes for them all."

Well, if there's anything in the Mendelian laws of heredity, that did not seem to us strange.

Concepcion Mission is beautiful too. In fact its twin towers give it a nobler effect than is achieved by the single tower of San José. But its custodian yawned in such an agony of boredom that we made our visit as brief as possible.

After all, it is perhaps little Espada that will live most lovingly in our memories. We hunted it up on a gloomy afternoon, and found a funeral in process of conclusion there. Restoration has not gone so far with this tiny church as with its more pretentious comrades and it retains more of the mellow grace of age and obscurity. The texture of its crumbling walls

is broken and tender. It looks like what it is: the unassuming spiritual home of a few parishioners. They were all of them there that afternoon, and we parked our car at a distance and stood aloof. Through the open door we could see the candles shining at the end of the dusky nave, and we could hear the chanting of the priest. Just outside the doorway stood the motionless figure of a young man, his head bowed on his arms on a broken bit of wall. An eloquent figure of grief.

All the San Antonio missions have known vicissitude. Apparently the Indians in this part of the country were less docile by nature than those in California and did not take so kindly to the Christian religion. Or perhaps the glaring inconsistency between the profession of love and the practice of hate was disintegrating to the walls which at the same time served as sanctuary and fortress. At any rate, most of the existing missions have struggled and failed many times. The resultant history, though less ordered and harmonious than that of the California missions, is somehow more human and vital. The San Antonio missions still live and function; those of California are dead or moribund.

The Witte Museum is another place in San Antonio where one can spend thoughtful hours. We especially liked the rooms filled with prehistoric Indian artifacts, and often returned to a certain collection of crude implements found in a cave where stalactites had grown below the layer of soot formed by the ancient fires. So long ago as that an American had

gnawed this ear of corn and left his tooth-marks on it!

In the museum, on Christmas Day, we witnessed a performance which, in our ignorance, we took to be a kind of miracle play, but which we now know to have been a survival of the Moor-versus-Christian theatricals taught by the early padres to the Indians in the hope of supplanting their barbaric revels. It was acted by Mexicans; and, though a little of it was interesting, that little went a long way. From the swarthy group of armored and bedizened men at one end of the room, a warrior would dash forward, fiercely intent on destroying the little white boy and girl guarded by a group of monks. To meet them an aged Franciscan would advance, brandishing a crucifix. The rôle which this feeble but intrepid old friar played was obscure to us—unless it supplied the element of comedy without which no drama is complete—but it was admirably enacted. Not only did he stop the headlong assault with his cross, but he also teased the enemy with it, tickling their legs, poking them in the ribs, until they retreated ignominiously. Bent double with age, barely able to shuffle his earth-bound feet, he got over the ground with the agility of a hoary brown spider. The little girl was so stately in her long white satin dress, with her crown and veil, that I think she must have represented the queen-bride of heaven; and the boy beside her with his sword may have been St. George. But that is mere surmise. If the play had lasted half an hour, it would have made a happy impression; but two hours of

repetition, accompanied by a loud monotonous nasal chanting, gave me such an acute attack of fidgets that finally, at the deplorable risk of rudeness, I slipped out and came away.

Because San Antonio is near the Mexican border and especially because it commands the beginning of the Pan American Highway at Laredo, the Mexican element in it is pronounced, and Mexican maps and guidebooks are in evidence. Therefore, it was quite natural that, as the wet weather continued, our thoughts should turn south rather than further west.

"I'm afraid you'll have to go somewhere," our ear specialist counseled. "It's too bad. I can't say I'm sorry, for Texas needs rain; but it also wants winter residents, and we'd like to have you stay."

"What do you know about Monterrey?" we inquired. "Is it warm and dry?"

"I'll find out through the Chamber of Commerce," was the reply.

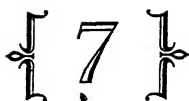
Ultimate verdict. When a Chamber of Commerce speaks, the matter is settled. Learning over our doctor's telephone that Mexico's rainy season was ended and that the climate of Monterrey was notoriously warm and dry, we paid our bill and decided to start south at once.

Not the very next day, however, for that was Christmas and we wanted to attend midnight mass in the San José Mission.

"Well, bundle up and keep dry," advised our doctor. "Good-by. Merry Christmas. Come again

in the spring and see what San Antonio weather is really like."

No doubt about bundling up! We were already wearing all the clothes we possessed. And when we set out at eleven-thirty on Christmas Eve, the pavements were dry. But, on parking our car near the Mission, we felt rain in the air; and, when we emerged from the lovely service, the best Christmas gift which Texas could desire was coming down in sheets. As such we welcomed it gamely and splashed cheerfully through the puddles. Nor did we complain when all the next day the torrents fell. It was our own fault that, reaching San Antonio at the wrong time for our special need, we had persisted in staying. We turned our gas heater high and, sitting close beside it, opened the Christmas cards and letters which made us more homesick than ever. Then, since doubtless already the good of our last ear treatment was lost, we resumed our imperfectly dried winter coats and went out for dinner at a swanky restaurant.



WE WENT to bed early that night and, waking early the next morning, I saw something which brought me out of bed and to the window with a leap and a shout:

“Christopher! The sun!”

Sure enough. As I spoke, a ray of light from an almost mythical luminary smote our incredulous eyes, and, like the muezzin tower, our whole house burst into song. In no time at all, the coffeepot was percolating madly, the egg water was boiling, and Christopher was snorting in his shower bath. Our troubles were over, our problem was solved. We were on our confident way to a warm dry climate, and the sun himself had arrived to see that we made the journey pleasantly. Let our ear ring if it must (and did). Appeasement awaited it in Monterrey.

Packing up takes some time when the entire contents of four suitcases and several boxes have been emptied into one small cottage; but long practice has taught us an almost automatic technique, and we were ready to start before ten o'clock.

“Sorry to lose you,” the friendly office clerk said. “May I ask where you’re going? Mexico? Oh, well, then, let me give you these books.”

Over the counter he pushed toward us two paper-bound volumes which were to be our inseparable and invaluable companions for the next two months. One of them was *Mexico in Your Own Car*, by T. S. Power; the other was *Guide to Mexico for the Motorist*, by W. B. Goolsby. We recommend them highly. Not always accurate in minor details, they yet impart succinctly and conveniently all the information which the traveler needs.

So here we were off again. And this time toward a destination entirely strange and unpredictable.

Of course we had read many books about Mexico. No one can help that nowadays. But they had not given us a consistent impression nor, to tell the truth, quite convinced us that we wanted to go there ourselves. Just why, I cannot remember, and it does not matter now. Of one thing we were at least perfectly sure: that an interesting experience lay ahead of us.

Most travelers cover the nine hundred and eighteen miles from San Antonio to Mexico City in three long consecutive jumps, spending the first night in Monterrey and the second in Valles or Tamazunchale. But Christopher and I are slow-going by nature and do not believe in trying to take any kingdom by violence. Gradual methods are more to our taste and a patient waiting upon the unknown event. So we made no haste over the excellent road which led to Laredo. The landscape was not very interesting, but the glorious sunshine atoned for all other deficiencies. Just to sit in its genial flood pouring in at the car

window was bliss enough. We lunched at a café in Pearsall and reached Laredo in mid-afternoon.

Here we decided to spend the night. This was partly because we had seen a delectable motor court with a flock of white doves and a big blue and green parrot flying freely about its wide patio; partly because we did not know how long it would take to get our Mexican papers. If Laredo itself were more interesting, that court would be a wonderful place in which to spend the winter. In fact, since most people seem to go to San Antonio exclusively for the climate, I wonder they don't some of them prefer Laredo. To bask in a half-acre patio, with grass and trees and birds and a fountain, is more fun than on a narrow terrace overlooking a suburban street.

However, though the sun continued to shine, the air was too sharp for basking on that December day. So, having secured our papers with an ease which surprised us, we roamed about the little town. A cactus garden attracted us, and we spent an hour exploring a collection which we learned later was the most complete in the United States. Then we had a good supper in the café of our court and went to bed early again. The night was so cold that our ear complained loudly, but we reminded it and ourselves that the bad weather was over now and that, as soon as the sun rose and we had followed it farther south, all would be finally well.

Our disappointment was staggering when we looked out the next morning and saw the same old gray sky which had shadowed us most of the time

since we left home, and the nipping air in the patio brought tears to two of our eyes.

What should we do? Cowering over our coffee cups in the imperfectly heated café, we at last put that question and squarely considered it. So far, our pursuit of a warm dry climate had led us from failure to failure. We had really been better off at home in our steam-heated house. Well, it was not too late to return. Should we confess ourselves beaten and give up and go back? Soberly we regarded each other, trying to plumb our respective reactions and arrive at a mutual policy.

"There's something stubborn about this trip," I said presently, speaking slowly to give us both plenty of time. "Our car felt it on entering San Antonio, and we feel it now. Yet the car went on."

"Yes," answered Christopher, and the note of relief in his tone gave me the clue I wanted. "After all, we take a chance whichever way we turn."

"And I've an idea," I continued, "that a trip to Mexico is so interesting that we ought not to object to—"

"Paying for it through the ear," finished Christopher.

"We'll go ahead then?" I questioned.

"At least to Monterrey."

Our state of attentive awareness made us both sensitive to the importance of the Rio Grande, and we crossed it thoughtfully. Not much of a river from the geographical point of view but vastly important otherwise, it lies like a naked sword between potential

lovers or enemies. Like an isthmus dividing two oceans of different waters and tides. Like the foot-lights in front of a stage: the same humanity on both sides, even the same historic traditions, but very different methods and ideals. At least, this is how the Rio Grande appears to me now that we have crossed it twice. On our first transit, I merely knew that we were stepping over a narrow threshold into an unfamiliar house of as many mysterious mansions as those hinted at in the Bible.

The simplicity of our reception was even more surprising than that of our dismissal from our native land the evening before. We had expected many questions and examinations, and had both of us carefully located ancient scars which we hoped might pass as proofs of recent vaccination. We were even prepared to be told that we must have anti-typhoid inoculations. But nobody paid much attention to us, save to register our car and give us driving papers; and soon we were out of Nuevo Laredo, headed south over a road which, for forty-seven miles, maintains an unswerving direction, the longest straight tangent in the world.

Was it imagination which made the country around us seem at once so different from any other we had seen? Its general contour was similar to that of southern Texas, or perhaps more nearly to parts of New Mexico. Harsh and monotonous. But the details were unfamiliar. Among the cactus plants which presently began to strew the arid region, many were new to us. And the houses were unlike any

other dwellings in North America. Some of them were of adobe, but most of them had flimsy wattled walls. Almost all of them wore low, thatched, overhanging roofs. The effect reminded us of African huts, as we had seen them pictured in books of travel, and the impression they made was one of poverty.

Not at once, then, does Mexico cast her veil of glamour about the arriving traveler. On the contrary, she withholds herself and, like one of her Indians with his drum, strikes the fundamental keynote of her national life. She is poor; she is poor. Understanding this dimly at the time and quite clearly before very long, we found the introduction noble, and proceeded to build up a concept of the country based on grave and simple facts.

The next revelation was admirable also. About eighty miles from Laredo, on the outskirts of Sabinas Hidalgo, stands the Power's Midway Café; and, since we were already profiting by the Power's guidebook, we thought it only decent to stop here for lunch. Leaving our car in the bleak and desolate desert, we entered the café and were at once received into color and warmth. Glowing rugs hung from the rafters and against the walls; brilliant baskets lay heaped on the tables; bright piles of pottery stood on the shelves. All were the work of the Indians, the same native people who lived in the inadequate houses. Poor was the artist, but sumptuous was his art. We wandered about the big room, beguiled and deeply interested, not so much just then by the actual product as by the racial character which it typified. Also by the his-

torical reasons for the great disparity. Why were such talented people so poverty-stricken?

The more I think about it, the better I like Mexico's mute statement of herself to the approaching traveler. She gives him at the outset the two most important clues to her significance. If he would understand her, let him hold them fast.

We bought nothing that day at the Power's Shop, nor were we urged to do so. But we noticed that northbound cars stopped and made many purchases. The sales psychology was sound. Incoming tourists do not want to burden themselves, and naturally they look forward to an unknown fullness and richness of opportunity ahead. They remember the first chance, however; and, realizing by-and-by how very full and rich it was, they hark back to it. Prices are no higher at Sabinas Hidalgo than in Mexico City or Taxco, and every Mexican handicraft is represented here. Which sounds like an advertisement on my part, but is simply a traveler's note.

Since our desire was now to investigate Mexico along as many lines as possible, hoping to establish a personal rapport, we ordered enchilada for lunch. It was, I am sure, a good specimen of the national viand, and Christopher liked it well enough to consume most of his portion, but I could make no headway at all with mine. Perhaps, like the Moor-versus-Christian play, there was just too much of it; perhaps a good deal less would have gone much further down my throat. As it was, after laboring along with a fork of hot coals in one hand and a glass of beer in the

other until the steam caused by the mixture ran down my cheeks, I sat back and gave up. I longed for a drink of water, but we were boggy-ridden by the idea that no Mexican water is safely potable. My only recourse when we re-entered our car, was to hold my mouth open before the window for several miles.

Twenty miles below Sabinas Hidalgo, the character of the country changed; and, having impressed her basic severity on us, Mexico gave us a glimpse of the magnificence which is also hers. Plunging into a group of foothills, the road went mounting and winding through Mameluque Pass. Instead of cactus, low scrub oak and pine covered the slopes of the mountains which seemed to rise with us, looming behind one another, opening out and closing in. The episode was exciting. We hailed it as prophetic of greater glories ahead.

But when we emerged from the pass, the gray sky was so low that we could see nothing beyond the immediate foreground, and even that was presently obscured by rain.

Rain!!

When the rainy season was over and the region which we were approaching was guaranteed warm and dry. No casual shower either, such as any climate may be pardoned for lapsing into now and then, but a deliberate downpour increasing in violence. The invectives we heaped upon the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce came with brilliant precision from our well-fired mouths.

There was nothing to do, however, but drive on

to Monterrey. So we presently closed our mouths to conserve their warmth for our bodies and devoted ourselves to making what speed we could.

Our usual method of travel is to slow down when we approach the place where we expect to spend the night, and scan the roadsides for a motor court. The Monterrey suburbs did not look promising. As soon as the houses began to appear, they moved solidly to the edge of the sidewalk and left no open spaces. But by-and-by, near a break in the pattern made by a military training school, we saw some unmistakable tourist cottages, and came to a halt. They were not attractive, however. In fact, they were distinctly forbidding. The dripping shade trees around them, designed for very different weather conditions, sent clammy chills down our spines.

"Let's go on and find a hotel," I said.

That was not so easy, however. We knew nothing about Monterrey hotels, nor where they were located. We should just have to continue to drive until one presented itself.

How it rained! The windshield wiper could not move fast enough to take care of the deluge; and, peering through the blurred glass, Christopher almost ran down a figure standing in a crossroad. Traffic policeman? No; as soon as we halted, he asked in hesitating English whether we had reservations in Monterrey. "For, if not, sir and madam, I shall be glad to show you the way to a very good hotel."

Two minutes later we stood in the tiled lobby of a small hotel obviously intended, like the trees in the

motor court, for hot dry weather. As such, in July and August, it must be very successful; but on the day of our arrival, the big, unheated, stone-floored room to which we were conducted repelled us uncompromisingly. With what I am sure was convincing regret, we explained that warmth was our first necessity, and re-entered our streaming car.

By this time dusk was gathering.

"We'll have to stop soon," said Christopher through his chattering teeth. "Don't you think we'd better go back to that motor court? The sign advertised heated cabins."

"Yes," I assented. "It will do for one night anyway."

Accordingly we retraced our route; and, dodging under the reeking trees, were presently all but embracing a small gas stove in a dark damp room.

"Turn it up higher," said Christopher.

"Can't," I explained. "It goes out then."

"But it seems to go out anyway if you even walk in front of it. Must be something wrong. I'll get the manager."

Like the hotel clerk, the court manager was apologetic. He understood, he was deeply sorry, but the unfortunate nature of this particular stove was such that it could not stand gas or draughts. Therefore, there was nothing to be done about it. A little heat is surely better than none at all? He looked so earnestly at us as he thus presented his logical conclusion that we in our turn understood the finality of the situation and resigned ourselves to it. Moreover we

wondered if we did not now understand Mexican history better. A nation with such a conviction of fatefulness in the very nature of things will probably tend to accept rather than control its destiny.

Were we not, for that matter, accepting ours? Here we cringed, deliberately exiled from furnace heat and insulated walls, from an open fire and lamps and books, from a radio and telephone. In search of dry warmth we went every day deeper and deeper into drenching cold. After a very poor supper in a sodden café, we sat on the floor in front of our six trembling beads of flame and, taking care not to turn our faces toward them when we spoke, discussed our quandary. I am sure that, at any rate, we had never loved our Vermont home so ardently as on that dismal evening.

In this discussion, however, although our plight was now worse than ever because we had abandoned hope of its improvement, there was no real hesitation. The bridge across the Rio Grande at Laredo may be built of steel and concrete, but every traveler burns it behind him when he enters Mexico. To turn back was impossible. Therefore we soon stopped talking and crawled into bed, piling on top of us every available cover, including two bath towels and a floor rug.

The next morning we lost no time about shaking the chilly puddles of the motor court from our feet and, returning to the city, we hunted until we found a steam-heated hotel whose lobby received us into an atmosphere of Paradise. Here in a small snug inner

room we sat by a whispering radiator all the rest of the morning and part of the afternoon.

Since we purposely sat with our backs to the window, we had no knowledge of what might be going on outside and were vastly surprised when, toward mid-afternoon, a splash of sunlight appeared on our wall. Amazing portent! We did not permit ourselves to attach much significance to it, but we accepted its challenge and, donning our coats and hats, went out into the street.

Behold, a miracle! Just as if it had never known any mood but one of serenity, a clear blue sky spanned the tops of the buildings. Already the pavements were dry. Up and down and across them moved a picturesque population, manifestly resuming a mode of life which they considered normal. The irrelevant rain had departed, and Monterrey was itself again. An enchanting self. With alacrity, we fell into step.

From the standpoint of later experience, I realize that Monterrey is not a typical Mexican city. It lies too near Laredo and has become commercialized by tourists. Nevertheless, looking back on that first afternoon there, I know that on no other journey to a foreign land, had I ever felt so far away from home and in such strange surroundings.

This was not because of the architecture. Many European cities resemble this town of narrow streets bordered by blocks of houses rising straight from the sidewalk and differing from one another only in the color of their pink and blue and green and yellow plastered walls. Like Europe too were the leafy plazas

and the fountains and churches. Also like southern Europe the glimpses through open doorways into hidden patios. But the people were not European: the men in sombreros, with *sarapes* over their shoulders and sandals on their feet; the women close-folded in the *rebosos* which make our United States feminine garments look so awkward and absurd. I cannot remember whether there were many burros abroad in Monterrey that afternoon; but I think that, even retrospectively, I should miss them from the picture if they had not been there. No pigs probably, however, or cattle or chickens tied by the leg. Those public citizens doubtless pertain to regions somewhat further from border prejudice.

When I said above that we fell into step with alacrity, I used a paradoxical expression which applied only to the first two minutes of our walk. After that, having already outstripped half a block full of people, we suited our pace to theirs and lifted one foot only after the other had taken root. At once we perceived that that is the way human beings should walk, clinging to the earth rather than rebounding from it, maintaining a deep firm contact with the universe. The confident poise thus engendered results in a magnificent carriage. Mexican men and women, especially when they are barefoot, walk very well.

I have used the word Mexican rather than Indian because I suppose that the foreign element in the racial mixture prevails over the indigenous in Monterrey. But I may be wrong there. As I may also be wrong in my discrimination between the two terms.

The truth of the matter is probably that an accurate discrimination is impossible. Mexico is thoroughly hybrid. Spaniards and Indians have interbred almost to the point of complete indeterminateness. Nevertheless, there is pride of race here, and whenever a pure-blooded heritage is even remotely plausible, it is insistently claimed. Physical traits persist on both sides as well as social traditions. And in Monterrey we perceived no Aztec influence.

Since a city's environment always seems to us an integral part of its meaning, we by-and-by interrupted our sauntering walk through the narrow streets and, reclaiming our car from a garage near our hotel, drove out into the country. The billowing mists which had once more swept over the sky were again breaking, and hills had begun to appear. Real hills this time, almost mountains. There was no doubt about them as there had been about the hillocks near San Antonio. We both sat up straighter and Christopher now and then narrowed his eyes at a view in a speculative manner. Perhaps, after all, if the weather should clear and warm up a little, perhaps? Experimentally, I turned off the heater.

"Very hilly country," said Christopher, stopping the car some two or three miles from the city and preparing to get out.

"Apparently, yes," I replied, getting out on my side too and looking upward. "Hills seem to supply the motif here. Look up. Even the clouds take the shape of mountains. That's funny. I can't remember ever seeing an effect like this. Cloud mountains don't

usually have such solid outlines." A pause. "Why, Christopher! Why, I almost believe . . ."

I dropped my eyes and my chin in amazement, and found Christopher's chin dropping also while his head, flat back on his shoulders, kept his eyes in the empyrean.

"They *are* mountains," he stated slowly in a stupefied voice.

That was one of the moments we shall always remember. Along with our first sight of the Grand Canyon. Along with our first Arizona desert. Along with a certain simultaneous sunset and moonrise when the two full-orbed luminaries faced each other across the earth. Like them it had the quality of complete surprise. The Monterrey hills, which we had taken for granted as ultimate features, were suddenly seen to be nothing but foothills to the majestic range which now hung over us from the very zenith and which, even as we gazed, withdrew again into the clouds. The effect was tremendous. We felt as if the concept of space had been visibly juggled before us and, looking into a boundless heaven, we had come up against the familiar outlines of earth. Which was which; earth or heaven? What was what, anyway?

Silently we resumed our seats in our car and drove back to town, keeping our eyes open for possible places in which to settle down for the winter.

But the next morning it was raining again.

"Oh, why don't you go on south?" said a genial Texan, scraping acquaintance with Christopher in the lobby of our hotel. "You don't know what you're

missing. Monterrey isn't Mexico. No, not even the mountains. I should say not. No, siree!" He gave a short laugh which, in the light of our recent experience, sounded impious to us but which we now understand. "I live just over the border, you see, and I run down as often as possible. I'm on my way home now and shall be glad to give you my road-map."

This was a generous offer, the openhandedness of which we did not appreciate until we had had some knowledge of the maplessness of Mexico. But it prevailed with us. We spent one more day in sight-seeing; then we took advantage of a dry morning which we hoped might herald another clearing and started away from a city of mountains barely glimpsed but never to be forgotten.

"Har!" said Christopher, tucking a rug around me and turning on the heater, for I had begun to sneeze. We were off for the tropics where warmth if not dryness could certainly be found.

Were we, indeed? Two blocks from our hotel, rain touched our windshield; before we had cleared the city limits, it was sluicing down; and in a span of five or six miles, the windshield wiper became once more impotent. The pavement grew slippery, the world beyond it disappeared; we might as well have been driving under a river or in the depths of the sea.

Christopher said nothing. I sneezed six times.

Now it is one of my worst marital liabilities that when I have a cold, I have it; and the glance which

Christopher gave me was eloquent. He slowed down and hesitated.

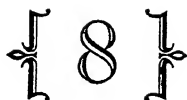
"Don't you think?" he began. "Anyway, it's not much fun driving in such a downpour, and we're missing the scenery."

"But where? where?" I lamented. "It's bad luck to go back, and we just can't afford to let our luck get any worse. There's no place, there's nothing—"

In this I was wrong, however. Even as I spoke, my eyes discerned a vague huddle of buildings almost obscured by the deluge; and with a quick twist of his wheel, Christopher drove into a motor court.

It proved to be a good one; new and therefore in working order, with gas stoves that glowed from bottom to top, with storm-proof walls and comfortable beds and plenty of hot water. Not gratefully, nor even graciously, but at least with resignation, we took possession of one of the cottages; and, while I went to bed, Christopher drove to the nearest pharmacist for nose-drops and gargles and tissues.

There, for the next two days, we struggled to keep our heads above the waters, physical and spiritual, of this devastating journey.



ON THE third morning, the sun came out again. We did not trust it this time. Our faith in it and in the warm dry climates it was supposed to foster was permanently impaired. But at least there it was for the moment, shining brilliantly, confidently, with the definitive thoroughness it knows so well how to assume. My cold was not much better; but, since it had taken the bit in its teeth and was determined to run its course, one place was perhaps as good as another for it. Our own running might even hasten its progress.

It did just that, with the unfortunate but probably quite correlative result that water streamed down my cheeks as fast as it had streamed down the windshield two days before, and my package of tissues was no more able to cope with it than the windshield wiper had been. The beautiful country through which we drove appeared to me as a marine, rather than a landscape.

But here I profited by the fact that Christopher and I have four eyes at our disposal. When a particularly noble range of mountains shouldered up against the sky, Christopher told me where to look and I mopped my vision clear for a breath-taking

glimpse. They were glorious mountains, serrated blue, wreathed with dazzling mists, high and remote and austere. The resplendent sun hurt my eyes, however, and I soon retired behind dark glasses and let Christopher describe the scenery to me like a radio announcer.

We had a late lunch in Ciudad Victoria where we had rather expected to spend the night. But the only hotel was so unattractive that we decided to drive on to Valles.

This was a lucky decision. For one thing, the processes of digestion had now given my mucous membrane something to do besides weep; for another, the sun did not shine quite so brightly in the tropical regions which we presently entered, and I could discard my glasses and look at the world.

Neither of us had ever been in the tropics before. Compared with South America or even Guatamala, I daresay this stretch of Mexican jungle is not very impressive, but it interested us greatly. Why are travelers always surprised to find places compatible with descriptions of them? "Oh, see the lianas!" "Look, look! there goes a wild parrot." "What impenetrable undergrowth. No wonder all the people around here carry machetes." It was truly no wonder, but nevertheless amazement was in our voices. The orchids were not in blossom, of course, but their great clusters hanging from the trees engaged our eager attention.

We passed only one sizable town between Victoria and Valles, and even the scattered houses were infrequent. The latter were uniformly made of split

bamboo thatched with palm leaves: building materials supplied by the local environment where forests of palms and swamps of bamboo lay on either side of the road and stretched as far back as we could see. Increasingly strange did the whole country seem.

It was not, however, the excitement of novelty which I craved so much now as the complete and soothing familiarity of bed and oblivion; and when we stopped at Valles, I unpacked my suitcase only barely enough to enable me to abandon myself to the homeopathic treatment of inner springs. After a supper of the most delicious orange juice I had ever tasted, I sank into warmth and darkness and depth below depth of sleep.

With the result the next morning that, though I could hear only imperfectly and could not speak at all, my vision was restored.

It may be that the influence of the unhurrying tropics was already upon us, or that we had an unconscious premonition of the nearness of our unknown goal; at any rate, we made a very late breakfast. Christopher said the big dining-room had been well filled the evening before, but this morning we had it to ourselves. The United States tourist comes sweeping down over the Pan American Highway, stopping only when night overtakes him and not always then, arriving late and departing early. Doubtless he has his reasons, but he certainly misses much.

One of my pleasantest memories of our whole Mexican sojourn is that of our ambling progress from Valles to Tamazunchale, a distance of seventy miles

to which we devoted three hours. The storm in my head was over and the tired peace which followed it was not unpleasant. Neither did I object in the least to being unable to hear or speak. All that I wanted was to sit quietly beside Christopher and look at the beautiful world about and above and below us. Oh, very beautiful!

The mountains were now close at hand and were densely wooded. We had been told that they resembled the hills of Vermont, but we thought them much bolder and more shaggy. They did not slope back from the valleys but sprang up in strong vertical lines which sometimes gave them an air of impending precipitously. Nevertheless, almost all of them had been cleared here and there in small farms which hung against their steep sides as towels and handkerchiefs hang from a line on washing day. They were incredible clearings. How could anyone have got up there at all to make them in the first place, and then how could they be cultivated? The answer must lie in the hands and feet of their owners, and we observed very closely such probable samples of these as we saw along the road.

They were small lithe people, very dark, very agile. The men wore white cotton pajamas made after a uniform pattern, with the legs either tied around the ankle or else rolled up above the knees, and with the short smocklike jacket hanging free. The women wore bright cotton dresses, also constructed to conform to tradition. The blouses allowed them a certain leeway in adaptation and looked modern enough,

but the long voluminous skirts were Victorian. Vastly hot and inconvenient they looked, swinging along on the edge of the highway above their wearers' bare feet. On their heads the men wore huge straw sombreros, and the women *rebosos* wrapped about the upper part of their bodies with unfailing grace. In the folds of these feminine garments, babies were generally carried, the tiny ones rolled up like cocoons, the bigger ones astride their mother's hips with their little bare feet sticking out on either side of her waist. Both men and women bore burdens; the men generally on their backs, held from slipping by a tump line over their foreheads; the women on a round cushion which fitted the crown of their heads.

These burdens were so heavy, so out of proportion to the people who carried them, that we began to think there must be something in the old story about the man who, by lifting a calf every day, was able to lift the bullock into which the calf grew. Surely only by a lifetime of bearing could a small Indian carry a huge load of sugar cane or firewood or crockery, mile after mile, uphill, downhill, across rivers and deserts. It was even probable that generations of training had made the feat possible. Were the Spaniards to blame, we wondered? Or had the Indian always taken for granted the functional use of his back as a vehicle? With all his native intelligence, he had never invented a wheel; and small good would it have done him anyway, living as he did by preference far up a steep mountain side. There must be something which we, with our labor-saving devices,

do not understand about the Indian's acceptance of hardship. The brown faces under the big straw hats certainly looked untroubled as the steadily trotting bare feet carried them along.

It may have been noticed that, in the last few lines, my pen has instinctively substituted the word Indian for Mexican. Whether the distinction is sound, I do not know. In fact, I may as well say here that all my comments on Mexico are made with a full realization of my ignorance and must be taken merely as personal impressions which I do not presume to utter categorically. But in the Mexican tropics, midway between Monterrey and Mexico City, the native residents seemed more truly indigenous than anywhere else. There was something as primeval as the flow of a river about the pace of their little caravans moving along the road.

Yes, even in spite of the fact that the burro was now omnipresent, and the burro came in with the Spaniard. The Indian knows his own when he sees it and deftly appropriates it. Bathtubs and bedsteads mean nothing to him; with mechanical methods available, he (or rather she) still prefers to grind corn by hand on a stone metate; but the burro fits so perfectly into the ancient scheme of life that he might have been here always. His slender, sure-footed little legs go up and down the perpendicular trails with no apparent effort, and his back accepts even more disproportionate burdens than that of his master. They are a pair, an unyoked team: this little brown man and this little gray beast, as they trot along the road,

barely visible under their toppling, wide-spreading loads. They understand each other, and even their expressions are alike: patient, uncomplaining, philosophical. I hardly knew which I liked better as, passing them, I often turned to look back.

After skirting Huichihayan the Pan American Highway prepares for its spring at the steep grades ahead by coiling itself like a rattlesnake; and our car went swinging around close curve after curve. The motion was rhythmic, almost hypnotizing—again like the snake. But that no immediate harm was intended we perceived when we found ourselves gently carried across a long bridge and deposited at the end of a village street.

Tamazunchale.

We had heard of this Indian village, familiarly known to English-speaking tourists as "Thomas and Charley," and had learned from our guidebook that its original meaning was "Temple of the Toad God." The context was not inviting. But the Indian name, unabused and untranslated, was musical, and so was the river slipping under the bridge. The wooded hills, rising on every side, were steep but gentle; there was an air of peace about the place. Had we not also heard that an excellent motor court was located here? Suppose we were to pause and inspect it? Slowly Christopher turned our car's nose down the long village street.

Now there are several motor courts in Tamazunchale; and, if we had not happened to remember the name of the one recommended to us, we might have

put up with a substitute. Very good, I daresay; I would not disparage any of them. But our failure to find the D. Z. Court would have deprived us of a uniquely delightful experience.

With what seemed to us at the time a perverse disregard of publicity, even of convenience, this court is located at the further end of the street from the Pan American Highway, and the road thither, though the main street of the town, is rough and dusty. For at least a third of a mile we went bumping over rocks and ridges, past broken fragments of sidewalk, between white-walled, palm-thatched little houses, through an untidy plaza, past an ancient church; and, at every slow revolution of our wheels, some unconcerned pig or dog or baby had a narrow escape. Our hearts were often in our mouths. But, making thence an easy ascent to our eyes, they looked at this little village and began to love it.

There was something gentle and friendly about it. The children's eyes laughed at us as they aired their English, "'Allo Good-by." The older people, more tactful, assumed that we spoke their language and said, "*Buenos dias.*" Almost everybody saluted us in one way or another, and we felt that here we were no longer just gringo tourists but recognized members of the human race.

Arriving finally before the D. Z. Court, we found it somnolent behind its high wire fence. Noon was not the hour for tourists; nobody expected us. This was all to the good, however. Undistracted by any

claims of politeness or expediency, we could survey the establishment and pass judgment upon it.

Its outer aspect was one of peace. On the left side of a wide courtyard stood a row of small adobe houses opening on a long stone terrace; on the right side stood a larger house with a deep verandah. Back in the middle distance rose a screened pavilion set with dining tables. Beyond that lay a garden, green with grass and coffee bushes and tall trees. Other trees grew in the courtyard. The whole place was sheltered and shady. Yet the sun broke through in golden pools, and the air was warm.

While we were looking and waiting, a dark face appeared in a doorway and gave us a fleeting but comprehensive glance. Then it withdrew and for another moment we were left in uncertainty. The treatment was very different from that accorded by most motor courts whose proprietors rush out with open arms; but we rather liked it. At any rate, we presently perceived that it suited the tall, dignified person who, presumably summoned by his Indian servant, came out of the house on the right and approached the gate. There was something about his bearing that fetched Christopher at once out of our car and halfway to meet him.

The gate remained closed, however, and it was through a smaller portal that Christopher gained admission. Distinctly we were on probation. Alertly intent, I watched through the windshield as the two men embarked on a colloquy, and I wished I had made sure that Christopher's collar was fresh that morning.

For the inspection taking place verged on the military.

Military too was the gesture which presently reassured me as our host held out his hand in a stiff salute. His face relaxed, and, recognizing their cue, two porters ran to swing the gate wide open. In another moment we had not only reached our destination but were enclosed in it.

In the course of the two weeks we spent in Tamazunchale, we learned that the D. Z. family was composed of an Austrian father, a Swiss mother, and two Mexican-born children. The parents had seen many places on both sides of the Atlantic. On first coming over from Europe, they had lived in various parts of the United States. Then an engineering job had brought them to Mexico City, and that had sealed their fate. When the job was completed, they found a return to the States, or indeed any departure from Mexico, quite unthinkable. So they cast around for a place to take root and decided on Tamazunchale.

That was in the early Thirties, when the Pan American Highway had just been put through. Overnight quarters were needed for the horde of tourists about to make two long grasshopper leaps from Monterrey to Mexico City, and Tamazunchale seemed the logical location. With all the energy of which it was capable (luckily, not too much), the little town set to work preparing itself for a boom. Just what happened or failed to happen, I do not know. I believe indeed that, for a few years, the boom worked out fairly well; and I am sure that the D. Zs., to whom energy was second nature, made the most of it. Cer-

tainly the recession left them with an established reputation. But, whether because of other and primal recessions, or because of the new hotel at Valles, or just because of tourist fickleness, there was never anything like a horde of travelers in Tamazunchale while we were there.

The wonder to us always was that any cars whatever made their way along the bumpy street to the modestly advertised Court; and we thought it a sterling compliment that, every evening, without fail, at least two or three horns were heard sounding at the D. Z. gate. Several times the cottages were all taken, and, once or twice, tourists had to be turned away.

It was our daily excitement to watch these arrivals from the world where we belonged but which now seemed less cognate to us than this motor court; and, sitting on our terrace at the inner end of the row of cottages, we took eager note of the license plates. Massachusetts once, Connecticut twice, but never Vermont. Illinois oftener than any state because (so we were told) a certain prominent citizen of Chicago is enthusiastic about Mexico and never fails to mention it in his many public speeches.

The little ceremony of reception was always the same, and so was the later ceremony in the dining-room. Very erect in his well-made and well-cared-for clothes, the proprietor went the round of the tables, pulling out the chairs for the women, decanting the wine, seeing that everything was in order, and conducting a fragmentary but vivid conversation. He had a keen sense of humor and a large fund of

general knowledge. Also a rare combination of sympathy and conviction. He knew just how to draw his guests out until he had measured their ground; then he met them there, either with a hand-clasp or a head-on collision. Much laughter seasoned those excellent meals. The very look of D. Z. was comical and endearing. He had a way of raising his hand flat before one's face, exactly like a traffic policeman. Stop!

Mrs. D. Z. seldom appeared in the dining-room. She was too busy superintending the work in the kitchen. But the success of the little establishment was largely her doing. Reliability emanated from her, as she moved now and then serenely across the courtyard. I never saw her hurry, yet she was always on time. She was a kind motherly woman, the German *hausfrau* at her best. No wonder her children adored her: a pretty daughter married to a local Mexican merchant; a lively young son in his teens who frolicked about the place and took a hand in all its activities.

During the long daylight hours between the departure and the arrival of guests, we saw a good deal of this family and became very fond of them all.

As for the guests themselves, our relations with them (if any) depended on many things. Sometimes they arrived so late that they wanted nothing but dinner and bed and we did not see them at all. Sometimes they were very chatty and, from the unfailing springboard of our license plate, leaped into conversation. "Gosh! you're a long way from home." Yes,

they said this even if they were from Ontario themselves. Apparently there is something about Vermont which seems to all the rest of the world topographically improbable. Once, starting from scratch with two travelers from Ohio, our random conversation disclosed a mutual acquaintance with places and people which kept our four tongues wagging all the evening. But, for the most part, the tourists who came and went while we were there made so slight an impression on us that we should not now recognize any of them.

It was not for their sakes that we lingered. In fact, it was precisely because they were so transient and extraneous that we liked Tamazunchale. We had found a rare combination of intrinsic Indian life with Nordic comfort and safety; and we stayed here in order to feel our way slowly into some sort of right understanding of Mexico.

{ 9 }

IT WAS a gradual process.

At first we explored the surrounding country a little in our car. But we promptly discovered that only two directions lay open: that to the north whence we had just come, and that to the south whither we planned to go later. We could have driven back from the highway to the village of Xilitla, but the road looked very repellent, and what would be the use? One Indian village is probably very much like another, and Tamazunchale served as an excellent sample. Better concentrate on that.

I remember the spot where we made this decision. It was at the junction of the road to Xilitla, and a group of Indians were drying coffee berries there. The operation interested us. On the ground in full sunlight the berries were spread on square mats over which stepped now and then a burro, strolled now and then a pig. My voice had come back so imperfectly that, when Christopher asked me a question, I replied with broken squeaks; and, greatly startled, the Indians stopped work and looked at me. "Witchcraft?" their faces said. "Cold in the head," stated Christopher. Then, realizing that he was up against the barrier of language, he resorted to pantomime and, pointing to

my throat, gave three loud stage sneezes. The effect was admirable. All the Indians shouted with laughter, and one youngster lay down in the middle of a coffee mat and drummed on it ecstatically with his bare heels.

Now at breakfast that morning we had been told that all the coffee consumed in the D. Z. Court is grown in its own back yard and prepared in the neighborhood. Therefore we experienced a momentary qualm. But we soon remembered that coffee berries have to go through many stages of treatment before they are stripped to the potable marrow, also that Swiss standards of cleanliness are the highest in the world; and, just as we continued to trust the D. Z. water supply, so we trusted its coffee.

In this matter of standards, however, a new and unexpected adjustment began to take place in us. Watching the Indians day by day, mingling with them freely in church and market place, we found ourselves not at all offended or even disturbed by some things which would have shocked us heartily in the United States. Unwashed bodies and garments, gamy hair, naked children, dusty food—these and a score of indelicate events taking place in public seemed entirely natural here. Nor was there any least sense of superiority in our realization that we could never, never live and act thus ourselves. Quite the contrary. Custom for custom, standard for standard, the habits of the Indians are certainly freer and more flexible than ours. Moreover, if justification were needed, a beauty flows from their communal gatherings which our northern crowds do not produce. After all, we can-

not too often remind ourselves that dirt is only the cosmic material in which, willy-nilly, every one of us lives, moves, and has his being. Forming the patina of a rose, it may also form the patina of a *reboso*, and water spoils them both.

As I write these heretical statements, I am comparing a stiffly clad, rigidly seated churchful of people in New York with the barefooted, half-undressed groups thronging in and out of the Tamazunchale cathedral; and the rhythmic grace of the latter seems to me probably more pleasing to the God who made man out of the dust.

But the stains on the façade of the cathedral itself are another kind of matter which a bath or a coat of whitewash would immensely improve. For they are a disfiguring blemish, and the natural beauty of the old church is thereby impaired.

I became very fond of this church. Though four hundred years is not a great age as antiquity goes among European buildings, it harks back to the dawn of history with us. And even before the advent of Columbus, the temple of the Toad God may have stood on this site. Beyond any reasonable question, there was an already ancient Indian village here on the twelfth of October, 1492. Sufficiently stirring to the imagination, however, is the indubitable fact that when the Pilgrim Fathers landed to establish the supremacy of the Protestant religion in America, the bells of Tamazunchale were ringing their daily summons to a Catholic worship. Also the correlative fact that, though its illustrious past has evaporated

from Plymouth Rock, leaving it a mere landmark, the early tradition of the Tamazunchale church still invests it persuasively. The very same words of the same liturgy echo against the old walls, and the very same people in almost the same garments kneel on the stone floor. The result is a sense of historical continuity which is a revelation to the United States citizen, accustomed to the disjointed phases and the scrapped traditions of his own national career. After all, he asks himself, after all, to whom does this continent belong? Who are the Americans?

Feeling that I could most nearly approach the people of Tamazunchale when they were most unreservedly and unconsciously themselves, I spent a great deal of time in the church through whose doors they drifted continually. From what I had read and heard, I had supposed that religion was completely discredited in Mexico, and I was amazed to find all the regular services of the church proceeding as usual. Try as I might, I could never arrive at a clear understanding of this. People gave me indefinite answers. Perhaps they themselves did not quite understand. Mexican history has also taken a turn at disjointed methods lately, and has possibly created more scrap-heaps than it can maintain. At any rate, in this matter of religion, I had a sense of brief irrelevant verbal confusion blowing upon a profoundly untroubled conviction, like a transient breeze setting itself against the current of a river; and I was willing to wager that, in another four hundred years, the bells of Tama-

zunchale would still be ringing these same people to these same services.

It was, however, between services that I felt most at home in the cathedral and liked best to sit on a bench against the wall and watch the Indians. That they were always completely at home here was evident. Alone or in small groups they entered, the men removing their hats, the women pulling their *rebosos* over their heads. On their bare feet they stood upright a moment, looking the length of the nave at the candle-flecked altar; then knelt (the men generally on the broad brims of their hats) and crossed themselves in a complicated gesture which I could not analyze. Forehead, eyes, mouth, breast received so many dedications, back and forth and up and down, that they became completely covered with an invisible pattern of holiness. After that followed prayers, uttered softly with rapidly moving lips, or else silent contemplation.

I remember the face of a young man whose slender barefoot body was clad in a soiled and ragged white suit. The dark bang of his hair straight above his eyes gave him a sculptured appearance, and the upright poise of his kneeling figure bore out his effigism. His features were sealed. But his eyes lived intensely. They were fixed on the altar and their pupils expanded as if he saw something too ultimate to be focused clearly. Never in any church have I seen the spirit of worship more eloquently embodied.

I remember a young expectant mother who came in, leading a little boy. Before an image of Mary she

knelt, placing her son before her; and, after guiding his small fingers through the intricate devotional movements, she herself made and maintained a gesture which I had not seen before. Palms up she held both her hands out sidewise from her body, and fell into a motionless supplication. The posture could not have been easy, but she seemed unaware of strain. For five or ten minutes she knelt thus, and the little boy was as quiet as she: mother and son invoking the blessing of Mary on the unborn life. Such simple fundamental beauty as that is worth a hundred sermons; and I felt as if, in looking on, I had caught a glimpse of the bedrock of religion. Official manifestoes will never blast it away.

The Feast of Epiphany occurred a few days after our arrival in Tamazunchale, and it kept the bells of the church ringing off and on all day. Kept me trotting, too, back and forth. But the climax of the celebration was reserved for the evening when the people came out in such numbers that Christopher and I hesitated to enter and thus usurp somebody's place or impede somebody's view. Nor was entrance necessary. As if foreseeing this very contingency, the double doors were flung wide open, so that everybody who stood in the courtyard before the church, shadowed by its huge laurel, could look the length of the nave at the blazing altar and could hear the music and the intoned prayers. That was an unforgettable episode. Sharply framed by the dark arch of the doorway, the brilliantly soaring interior was also solidly weighted by the mass of the worshippers'

garments, black or navy blue. The effect was both exciting and soothing, a masterly study in contrasts and values, a summons to the imagination such as Mexico gives magnificently.

The market place came next to the church as an arena for social gatherings. It occupied a wide dusty plaza, and something was always going on there by way of commerce. But Sunday was the regular weekly market day. Having heard that the Tamazunchale market was famous for its interest, and remembering markets in the United States, I distinctly dreaded our first Sunday here; while at the same time, I would of course not have missed it for anything. Even Christopher laid aside his painting for this occasion. Had we not seen, all the preceding Saturday, groups of Indians trickling in from the mountains above and around us, bearing incredible loads on their backs or on those of their burros? Had we not heard from the village street an increasing hum of voices, bursting now and then into music or laughter? So that finally we had made a late evening excursion and had found the town so full of people that we had had to step over sleeping figures on the sidewalks or even in the road. Entire families were camped out here, with only a pot of beans or stew for domestic equipment. Evidently we were in for a novel experience.

But, "Where do you suppose it begins?" I asked Christopher as, early the next morning, we walked down the quiet street. "Or perhaps we're too early, and it hasn't started yet."

"On the contrary," replied Christopher, always quicker witted than I, "I should say it was well under way and we're in the thick of it."

"But . . ." I objected, looking around for big booths and bright awnings, listening for strident voices, and finding nothing but small collections of articles laid on the ground by the side of the road, with here and there a flimsy framework erected to hold *sarapes* and rugs. The few awnings in evidence were strips of plain, time-worn canvas suspended above rude counters of board, and there were no importunate salesmen. The people in charge of the humble collections of merchandise squatted or stood quietly beside them, making no effort to advertise them, not even meeting the eyes of possible purchasers. The latter strolled by very slowly, pausing now and then for a prolonged study of some bowl or basket, but seldom stooping to touch it. The air of the market was hushed and intent. Serious matters were in hand.

To be sure, there were places where the prevalent mood was enlivened by laughter and gaiety. Family groups shared their viands, prepared then and there on the ground, with other groups from distant valleys; children, more or less naked, played games together; lean dogs ran in and out, forever sniffing after scraps of food. There was even a homemade and hand-propelled carrousel, with rather more children running round and round beside it than seated on the horses and bulls.

But, no matter how many people there might be in any given space, they never constituted a crowd; and

there was no confusion or tumult. Incredible market day!

After making the circuit and getting a general idea of the outfit, Christopher and I decided to settle down to the business of watching one sale, if indeed there was anywhere one which looked promising. So, after several false starts, we concentrated on a barefooted Indian who, ever since our arrival, had persistently hovered near a display of *huaraches*. He certainly needed a pair of these woven sandals, and that he more than half expected to buy them seemed fairly evident.

At the moment of our pausing, he had just emerged from his prolonged preliminary period of contemplation and had stooped to pick up a pair of the shoes. The vendor glanced at him indifferently and went on exploring the hair of the little boy who crouched between his knees. Good business there, at any rate.

The two processes which followed reminded me of my own always painful and sometimes quite agonized reading of galley proof, searching, searching, lest I overlook some mistake. But the Indians' concentration made mine seem trivial. Especially that of the would-be purchaser. Over and under, inside and out, from toe to heel and back again, he scrutinized those *huaraches*, testing them here with his thumb, scratching them there with his fingernail, turning them in his hand to see how they looked at different angles. Then, very slowly but with a deliberate air of having advanced in a prescribed ceremony, he replaced the sandals and took up another pair. These he subjected to the same investigation, ending in the same return.

His brooding face was so impassive as, pair by pair, he went through the whole collection, that we could not guess whether he found defects in them or simply hoped that another pair might satisfy him better.

Our disappointment was keen when at last he arrived at the end of the row and straightened himself. After all, he had not been in earnest and no sale was to be made. But, before we could turn away, the Indian removed his hat, wiped his forehead, drew a long breath, and embarked on the second stage of the ritual which consisted in trying on pair after pair of the sandals. Not every pair in the collection, for evidently his close study had led him to certain discriminating conclusions which narrowed his further choice. But over his conspicuously unwashed feet he pulled and removed so many *huaraches* that we became quite tense with anxiety.

Not so the merchant, however. He continued calmly to work his way through the fruitful preserve of his son's hair until at last a pair of sandals remained on the purchaser's feet and a knotted handkerchief was produced. Then he laid his comb aside for safe-keeping in one of the unsold *huaraches* and held out his hand for payment.

It was that knotted handkerchief which, more than anything else, explained to us the inner nature of the sale we had just observed, as well as the whole market place. Such a pitiful little deposit of coins indicated a poverty which made any expenditure a slow and difficult business, requiring the utmost foresight and care. No wonder the stock was so plain and meager.

The merchant was no better off than his customers. In fact, I daresay the two functions were interchangeable; and the buyer of the *huaraches** doubtless returned to a small pile of pottery which he had left in charge of his wife.

I hope it was from his pile that Christopher and I by-and-by bought a little pitcher and bowl. We had been told in the United States not to pay any sum first named by an Indian, and our immediate impulse, on this and every occasion, was to pay double. For the bowl and pitcher, though crude, were handsome, and twenty-five centavos apiece seemed shamefully inadequate. Yet, as I hesitated, I saw an Indian woman beside me pull from her pocket another of those knotted handkerchiefs, and I realized that overpayment on my part might complicate matters for her. So I paid the stated price. As, later, we paid fifty centavos for a hand-woven basket. But we were never at ease in our minds over the fact that, partly because of the withdrawal of American deposits from Mexican banks, the peso had dropped from fifty cents to twenty, and Mexican prices, always moderate, were to us absurdly low.

Besides shoes and baskets and pottery, the Tama-zunchale market displayed straw sombreros, stone *metates* and pestles, bright handkerchiefs, machetes, Woolworth jewelry and cosmetics, fruits and vegetables (some of these very exotic), curious breads and pastries: all spread in square mats on the ground. Hanging precariously from temporary scaffolds were *sarapes* and dresses, blankets and rugs. Also hanging

from bars of wood were thin strips of raw meat which looked completely repulsive. But when Christopher had assured me that, having been dried in the sun, they were entirely wholesome, I surprised him by taking him at his word and buying several pounds. Not for home consumption but to feed to the hungry dogs forever questing, questing among our feet. Especially to one emaciated mother dog who bolted her mouthful, followed by an entire loaf of bread, and then scrabbled over a wall to pass the nourishment on to her progeny.

In parenthesis, I must add that I was much stared at and laughed at for this deed, and, I am sure, extensively discussed behind my back. The resulting consensus appeared to be that I was an eccentric gringa with a queer passion for dogs; and the next morning a small boy arrived at the D. Z. gate, lugging a puppy which he wanted to sell me for four pesos. For several days, a dog and I could not occupy the plaza at the same moment without causing a mild sensation of hopeful nudges and innuendoes which I frequently gratified from a neighboring bakery. But, on one such occasion, a ravenous dog had no sooner begun tearing the loaf I gave her than a youthful onlooker found the daft situation intolerable and sought to restore it to normalcy by throwing a lasso around one of the dog's legs. There was then a grand fracas, with a yelping dog and an irate gringa who shouted commands in English, surrounded by a cheering crowd. But the lasso came off. Oh, yes! Queer

though she was and quite incomprehensible, this gringa managed to make her essential meaning clear.

The truth seems to be that the Mexican attitude towards domestic animals is paradoxical. They must love them, for no family is too poor to own at least one dog; but they show no evidence of feeling any responsibility for their care. I doubt if they ever feed them, except accidentally. In one of the domestic circles in the Tamazunchale market, I saw a baby upset a plate of beans. Carefully the mother spooned most of the beans back from the ground to the plate, while a dog watched avidly. Then, the instant she stood up, a hairy muzzle appropriated the residue. The intent preoccupation with which dogs ran constantly about the market place showed what this weekly concourse meant to them. The famished look in their pale eyes is something I do not like to remember. Yet I cannot subscribe to the statement that Mexicans are innately cruel. Their tenderness toward their children belies that. I think perhaps their own age-long preoccupation with hardship has stiffened them in the conviction that such is the common lot and that, if men can endure it, so can their dogs.

On one edge of the plaza, a little removed from the crowd as befitted its almost sacred prestige, was the corn market; and here sales were more frequent and less cautious than anywhere else. For every Indian must have corn; his life depends upon it. Great sacks stood bulging, ready to pour their golden kernels into the smaller sacks brought to convey the precious load up the steep trails. With a heave of his arms

and a practiced shrug of his shoulders, the purchaser lifted his bag to his slender back, adjusted the tump line on his forehead, replaced his hat, and trudged away on his long journey to his distant home. There was dignity in his patient bearing, even nobility. However matters may stand with him politically, the Indian who needs nothing but a bag of corn, which he can carry home on his back, possesses a measure of freedom unknown to most of us. This particular Indian did not even need *buaraches*, for bare feet climb better than any shoes; and the clinging of his entire sole to the earth, as he put it down and released it, gave an impression of intimate contact which was almost one of integrity. He did not so much lift his foot as pull it away.

After this first market day, we made the most of the others which occurred during our stay in Tama-zunchale. Like the natives, we anticipated them by haunting the plaza on Saturday afternoon. Selecting a bench in a salient spot, we sat and watched the families arrive, laden with their merchandise.

I remember a man who carried on his back a kind of wicker cupboard, extending from the base of his spine to the top of his head. In it were dozens of jugs and jars.

"He'll be glad to sit down and rest," I remarked to Christopher, as the load was carefully unstrapped and lowered to the ground.

But I was mistaken. Wiping his forehead and replacing his hat, the pottery vendor straightened himself and fell into an easy pose, one leg crossed over

the other, its toes barely touching the ground. So little tired was he that he needed the minimum of support.

I remember another man who, on arriving, was visible only as a pair of thin legs under a load of alfalfa, yet who, as soon as his burden had been removed, darted across the plaza to start the carrousel.

"What must it feel like to have such an untiring body!" I marveled, already a little tired myself from sitting on a hard bench with an inadequate back.

"Worth centuries and generations of hardship perhaps," replied Christopher.

It certainly made our Anglo-Saxon civilization seem flabby to compare it with that of those Indians. Redundant too and unwieldly. We once watched the erection of a booth intended for a display of women's dresses. The materials consisted of two vertical poles forked at the top, and a horizontal pole resting upon them. Also a table made by laying a board on two boxes. The assembling took about ten minutes and was accomplished by one man and a boy. So simple and easy. And wholly adequate. The gay cotton dresses hung from the pole and lay piled on the board as effectively as in a city shop. There was no "overhead" but the sky.

To be sure, one contingency worried us somewhat: namely, the weather. That it could rain in Mexico, even out of the rainy season, we knew all too well. But probably Indians are weatherwise and know when to expose and when to protect their wares.

Saturday evening became our favorite time in

Tamazunchale. Then the preparations for market day were completed, most of the people had arrived, and the region in and around the plaza was filled with family groups camping out in an informal fashion. No beds, no pillows, no blankets; simply the earth and the sky.

"What must it be like," thus again we remarked to each other, "to need so little, to need nothing at all!"

"To carry your inner springs with you," summed up Christopher.

There were drawbacks of course. D. H. Lawrence has somewhere given a very spade-like name to the most prevalent odor in Mexico, and we could not fail to recognize it with distaste. But not with the loathing which we had expected. After all, what was it but a kind of barnyard smell, which in New England is considered eminently respectable?

It really is strange, however, that the Mexican nature should compass so easily such contrasting extremes of grossness and delicacy.

I remember an Indian sitting at one end of an otherwise empty bench. He was very ragged and dirty. Christopher and I looked at each other dubiously when we realized that all the other benches were full and that, unless we sat down by this probable dispenser of small local fauna, we should have to continue to walk. But fatigue was too much for us, and we presently subsided on the other end of the bench. I am afraid we sat close together. I am sure it did not occur to us to salute our neighbor, for that is not the custom in Central Park or on Riverside Drive.

And he, for his part, paid no obvious attention to us. But when, after five minutes, he got up to go, he turned toward us and holding his filthy hat in his hand, murmured, "*Permisso*," so courteously that a mixture of admiration and shame flooded over me. What beautiful manners! Mine was the grossness on that occasion, and I felt it keenly. Especially since my ignorance of Spanish prevented me from making a suitable reply. Abruptly it seemed to me the height of rudeness to come barging into a foreign country without taking the trouble to learn its language; and, in my remorse, I called after the Indian, "Excuse me. 'Allo Good-by."

That he understood the last word I was sure, for all the Tamazunchale children hailed us with it continually: "'Allo Good-by."

There were swarms of these children and they too were courteous. One evening when we passed along the street, we heard a great shouting and laughter in an open lot behind a high fence; and, stopping to look in, we saw a children's party in full swing. They were just beginning to make a blindfold attack on a big paper bag of presents which hung from the limb of a tree. A little boy, armed with a long stick, was blundering about, making futile passes in wrong directions. Hearing Christopher's laughter, which is very contagious, and seeing our attentive faces, these youngsters paused for a brief consultation; then one of them came to the gate and, in halting English, invited us to enter and share the game. That was an act of generous sharing which would have been un-

likely to occur in our home town; and, though we did not accept the invitation, we savored and pondered it.

Are these people racially older than we, and therefore more mature? Is that one reason why they have such gracious manners? Is their simplicity not the result of knowing no better but of knowing enough? And is their present trend toward socialism only the natural inclining of the tree the way the twig was bent? Christopher and I are not learned enough to answer these questions, but they sprang from a deep suspicion of truth.

Outside the open windows and doors of the Tamazunchale schools we often lingered, perplexed by the tumult inside. This was a chronic condition for which we never received a reliable explanation. Some people told us the students were required to con their lessons aloud; others said the noise was the result of modern pedagogical notions about personal freedom. Whatever the cause, the effect was dynamic. All the faces looked happy, even those of the teachers moving from desk to desk, beset behind and before by eager questions, waylaid by papers to be criticized and books to be explained, also sometimes by fingers to be bound up and noses to be wiped. The job of a Mexican schoolteacher is apparently no simple one.

"How can they think at all in such a racket?" I said to Christopher.

"Well," he replied, "apparently they've got some technique of concentration."

Like everything else in Tamazunchale, the school equipment was inadequate. The books were few and

worn, the blackboards were small, there were no globes and maps such as every school possesses in the United States, even the desks had to do double duty. But there was a zestful spirit about the daily and nightly sessions which ignored limitations. We were told, as of course we had read beforehand, that the new Mexican government is stressing education as earnestly as it has been trying to soft-pedal religion; and I think it must be succeeding in arousing the people to a desire for instruction. The prescribed courses are in national history, in economic theory and practice, in scientific methods. The summons is to a sleeping race to awake and know itself. For not yet, in all these centuries, has Mexico ever come to self-knowledge and found its own way of life.

In the present leader, Lazaro Cardenas, an almost pure-blooded Indian, one feels the burning of a passionate desire to reinstate the humble people of his race. This country was theirs in the first place, and theirs it has always stubbornly remained. But the ownership has not been apparent and the fealty has lapsed. With all the might there is in him, their kinsman, risen to power, is making the most of his opportunity to revive the ancient alliance. Much as, in the United States, our own great President is working to restore the forgotten man.

At least, this is the way I, in my avowed ignorance, read the signs of our stirring times; and I should think Roosevelt and Cardenas would be friends.

But the uphill work is against tremendous odds. Mexico's population lives, for the most part, in

scattered villages or tiny groups of houses, far away among the mountains, and the government is too poor to send many teachers thither. Moreover, Indian psychology is deep and slow. It has probably learned profound lessons in poverty and isolation, and may look askance on invitations to emerge and enjoy the brisk and brittle benefits of modern civilization.

The experiment is one which the onlooker watches with great interest.

Thus in observation and speculation passed our fortnight in Tamazunchale. Christopher painted every day. I read Shakespeare and knitted, but was content to do nothing much of the time. The tropical climate was relaxing, the quiet beauty of winding river and wooded hills afforded occupation enough for the musing mind.

Such personal contacts as came my way I welcomed eagerly. A young Canadian woman, fair-haired and blue-eyed, held me breathless one afternoon by telling me how she had been "led," step by step, from her cool distant home to these hot jungles, in order that she might work in a small local hospital. She related the story quite simply and with such complete lack of self-pity that I honestly think she felt nothing but gratitude for the fulfilment of a life's ambition. Her blue eyes widened and shone.

"Wasn't it wonderful to have the way always opened before me like that?"

But when I asked if I might visit the hospital, she shook her head.

"It's not for the likes of you," she informed me.

"To the Indian women it's Paradise, but it would shock you horribly. One has to live here a long time to understand how impossible certain standards are."

She smiled to herself as if she were savoring some monstrous but rather engaging incongruity.

The sense of strangeness in our surroundings persisted. Every morning and evening a flock of wild parrots flew chattering over the village on their way to or from the mountain where they spent their days. Every evening, when Christopher and I walked to the end of the street and came up against the wall of jungle rising abruptly against the sky, our ears were astonished by the clamor of insects. As our eyes were amazed by the vividness of the trees in the effulgent moonlight which revealed even the color of flowers. Every midnight the rooster who crowed punctually at that hour, woke me to a conviction that his voice was the scream of a panther. So incredible was the realization that Tamazunchale and Dorset, Vermont, are integral parts of the same continent.

We could have stayed there forever, and the wonder is that we didn't. But a restlessness stirred in us by-and-by, a desire to see other aspects of this Mexican life which we found so appealing, an urgent wish to explore the mountains soaring just above us. So, happy in the thought that we should surely return here on our way back, we packed our car and drove away.

Our ear was no better, but we had now made up our minds to ignore it as much as possible.

{ 10 }

I CONFESS I was nervous as we headed south. A friend in Vermont, who had taken this trip the winter before, had refused to give us any advice save the reiterated counsel, "Remember, it's only one hundred and fifty miles." Meaning, we supposed, that such a definitely limited strain could be endured.

But a page in one of our guidebooks showed a diagram of the highway between Tamazunchale and Mexico City which was not calculated to allay misgivings. In the lower left-hand corner reposed Tamazunchale, secure by its placid river. Immediately behind and above it, sprang a great welter of mountains, surging up and up, crowded together like sugar cones in a box, with hardly a valley amongst them: a steep and vertiginous world. Yet straight at these mountains a road hurled itself, like a double tandem whiplash caught by a motion camera; a thing of incredible ripples and loops, soaring and leaping, plunging. Perhaps, after all, a dying snake is a better simile. There was such a compelling impression of violent activity in this forbidding diagram that, brooding over it, I did not see how a car could trust the road to keep still long enough to be negotiated.

Christopher and the D. Z. family laughed at my fears. Why, I could see for myself that many cars

made the trip every day, even large trucks and busses, even trailers. The roadbed was wide and the grades were none of them over six per cent. Nevertheless, I could also see for myself that many of the drivers who spent the night with us on their way north, looked tired and jittery, and I could read in the guidebook the explicit statement that, in the first nineteen miles above Tamazunchale, the road climbs three thousand feet.

On one point, people and guidebooks were agreed: that, except under absolute compulsion, one should not make this trip in bad weather. For, even on pleasant days, there are sometimes blinding mists in the high mountains, and rain is a serious handicap. Therefore, when the appointed day of our departure from Tamazunchale dawned in a tropical downpour, we arranged for an extension of our stay another twenty-four hours.

The result could not have been happier. The sun rose clear the next morning and, in a pellucid air, we left the newly washed village, setting our faces toward mountains whose wooded crests stood out against a radiant sky.

They were friendly mountains at first, not at all like the severe jagged formulas which had filled the guidebook diagram. Their effect upon us was almost as gentle as that of Tamazunchale, and we felt quite at home among the palms and bananas, papayas and mangoes and coffee bushes. Nor, unless we had known it beforehand, could we have realized the steepness of our ascent. Smoothly purring along in

high, our car took the wide curves without pause or effort, and the swing of the wheel again grew rhythmic.

Nevertheless, our minds were as alert as our senses today; and we wanted not only to enjoy the beauty of this drive but also to appreciate the tremendous skill, the amazing triumph over difficulty which it signalized. Therefore, when we came to a certain pass named El Purgatorio, we drove off the pavement into one of the lookouts provided at frequent intervals, and gave ourselves over to observation and wonder.

The sheer side of the mountain to which we here clung had once thrust itself out in a promontory of solid rock with a laminated formation intractable to the human hand. What then? Dynamite was the answer, thousands of tons; and two years of hard work, with a toll of how many lives I do not like to remember. The promontory vanished, but the mass of the mountain still looms above the narrow thread of road and drops below it.

Was the effort worth while? Thus we questioned as, turning our faces the other way, we looked out over the vast expanse of heaving peaks filling the broken horizon line with their tumult of arrested motion. Gentle no longer they were at this spot, but wild and savage. Essentially solitary. Would it not have been better to have left this turbulent country to work out its own tameless destiny than to have intruded our smug little tourist cars into it? As part of the reason for creating that titanic highway, Christopher and I and our Chevrolet felt very inadequate.

Much more suitable was the experience of two of our friends who, arriving at El Purgatorio soon after its completion, found the road blocked by a landslide and were forced to abandon their car and crawl on their hands and knees over the landslide itself for an eighth of a mile. With the scene actually before us, we shivered as we visualized that precarious transit, every gesture of which endangered another avalanche. Human endurance is grand in itself; and those of us who come after, must highly resolve to turn the fruit of courage to such noble use that it will prove to have been worth while. American tourists, rolling smoothly down into Mexico, have it in their power to help make or mar the new birth toward which the nation labors.

As I thus cogitated, feeling very small and humble, a surprising procession came around the curve of the road. A group of four burros, walking abreast (abreast, if you please, on that dangerous curve!), followed by two men and two women, three children, a dog and a pig. They straggled all over the roadbed, paying no obvious heed to the hazards of precipice or traffic, serene, unperturbed, completely at home in their own element.

The first effect was appalling. "Gosh!" said Christopher. "I think I hear a car coming." And he started to get out. But then he realized that any addition to the throng would only make it more unmanageable, and that our most helpful conduct would be to sit still now and hold ourselves ready to

pick up the pieces (if any) afterwards. So we froze to our seats and held our breath.

Not so the Indians. That they heard the approaching car was apparent from their glances and gestures, but that they felt any more responsibility toward it than toward a gust of wind was not evident. One man shrugged his shoulders, another nudged his burro aside, both women herded their children into the right-hand lane. But the left lane was so far from cleared that catastrophe seemed inevitable. On came the invisible car, climbing curve after curve; pat stood the Indians, no longer advancing but awaiting the ineluctable event. Finally, at the last possible moment, the pig saw his cue and took it. Perhaps the blood of the wild boar ran in his veins and he was therefore the oldest inhabitant of these mountains, he to whom they most rightfully belonged. At any rate, he stepped forward with a royal composure and placed himself directly across the left lane. "So far and no farther," might have been written on his broad black side.

The expedient worked to perfection. With a screech of brakes, a jolting of springs, and a loud Yankee oath, a Ford sedan came to a dead stop one inch and a quarter from the pig. There was a second of silence. Then, "Well, of all the gol-darned countries!" the voice continued behind the Connecticut license plate; and, with one accord, everybody, except the pig and the burros, burst into laughter, the Indians gleefully, the two New England men with a certain exasperation, the one New England woman a trifle

hysterically. "That's my third stop this morning," the Connecticut voice continued. "Both other times I had to get out and remove sleeping burros. Now who's going to remove that pig?"

This episode, with all its implications, did much to calm my fears concerning the development of Mexico. If the native Indian life, down to its pigs and burros, appropriates our alien innovations and converts them to its own uses in its own immemorial manner, we cannot harm it greatly. The Pan American Highway exists ostensibly as a link between two democracies, but really as a convenience for local Indians. Tourists may come and go over it, but they will have to watch out for domestic animals. And incidentally, in the presence of the latter, lies the only genuine peril of this famous road.

A few miles beyond El Purgatorio, we came to a place called La Gringa because a Yankee woman once drove her car over the precipice here. I think it was in this region that, when the road was in process of building, workmen were lowered in baskets over the edge of the cliffs in order that they might drill holes for dynamite. Thus a narrow shelf was blasted out from the face of the mountain; and, little by little, with chisel and hammer, the roadbed was widened back. Again we felt that only heroic chariots should drive over such a road.

We had now reached an altitude of five thousand feet, and the air was as heady as the view. The vegetation had changed to oak and pine and silver birch. The small villages and scattered houses were more

solidly built than the bamboo huts below, and were thatched with straw or maguey instead of palm leaves. The country far beneath us opened out in a narrow valley threaded by the same Moctezuma River familiar to us at Tamazunchale; and vultures floated above them, ubiquitous birds which in Mexico are transmuted from obscenity into grace and beneficence. Farms appeared, with cattle feeding in pastures of lush grass. Except for the absence of snow peaks, we might have thought ourselves in Switzerland.

Not for long, however. Once more the road grappled with crowding giants, dodging in and out among them, now this way, now that, now up, now down. Skirting the edge of one perpendicular cliff which dropped thousands of feet, we paused to admire its contours as thoroughly unique; and were surprised and incredulous when, fifteen minutes later, we found ourselves again looking down at it. Were we becoming a little deranged by our flighty experience? Then we realized that we had made the circuit of an entire mountain caught in a loop of the road.

There were few settlements in this zone, for the excellent reason that there was no room for them. But I remember one rather sizable village which clung to the sharp narrow ridge of a hill dividing two valleys. Every house appeared to be higher at one end than at the other and to look down a sheer precipice on either side.

Soon after this we began to descend, and presently saw the town of Jacala lying directly below us in a

wide bowl. We had looked forward to this spectacle, both because of the guidebook's lavish encomiums and because Jacala was the only place where we could safely have lunch; but in neither expectation were we gratified. The houses did not seem to us very "clean and sparkling," nor did the small shallow lake "scintillate" properly. The laurel trees made no conspicuous "emerald setting for the shining jewel." A rather drab little Mexican town was Jacala in our eyes. We ate our poor luncheon resignedly because we thought we must have come to the wrong restaurant; but, on our way back, five weeks later, we tried the only other café and found it worse. So, unless our experience was unlucky and our judgment therefore faulty, Jacala's reputation is not fully deserved.

That the view was superb we admitted; but here our judgment was certainly prejudiced, for the way in which the mountains ahead of us closed in and towered up instead of opening out, gave us more pain than pleasure. As so often happens on our motor trips, we were beginning to feel that we had had enough of grandeur. Enough! We wanted to be let alone for a while to appropriate a small fraction of what we had already seen.

There was nothing to do, however, but once more set our Chevy's nose straight at a manifest impasse; and, at the ultimate instant of violent recoil, feel ourselves again caught up, swung around in every direction, dropped, retrieved, hurled lightly from peak to peak. It was as if teams of giants were playing ball with us. And, for all I know, that may be the

cosmic significance of the Pan American Highway: to enable the Sierra Madre mountains to beguile their immortal leisure by a pleasant game. The sport of the gods.

But even gods tire of pastime; and when, at Kilo-metro 226, only about thirty-five miles beyond Jacala, we reached the top of the mountain range, we found that the game was over, and all that remained for us was to roll smoothly to Mexico City, still one hundred and thirty miles away. The central plateau of Mexico is so exalted that we had not even yet attained the highest elevation between Monterrey and Mexico City, but there were no more grades and curves. The mountains stood back, the world widened about us, and we settled down to a quieter contemplation.

We were now in a realm of deserts. There is little rainfall on this side of the Sierra Madres, and the vegetation consists mostly of cactus and maguey. Not very beautiful. In Arizona, two years before, we had learned to love the desert in all its aspects, and had therefore looked forward to this particular stretch of the Pan American Highway. But we were disappointed. The topical genius of Mexico is not for deserts. The restless country does not know how to subside and lie quietly under the sky, reflecting celestial moods. These barren reaches of stony soil, brown even under the midday sun and dotted with stunted cactus growth of a dull tawny green, looked sullen rather than peaceful, gave an impression of

seething protest barely restrained. For all its flatness, it was a tormented landscape.

Christopher thought its depressing effect largely due to the ancient ruins which lay scattered over it: ruins of Spanish churches surrounded by the crumbling walls of a few pitiful houses. The heartbreaking hardship which attended the settlement and precarious maintenance of these early missions may still invest them in the eyes of those who see them now. Perhaps he was right. But any unselfish and spiritual act of the Spanish conquerors ought to have left an undying spark of glory, and I was ashamed that I remained unkindled by the sight of the vestiges of their faith.

If it had not been for the frequent towns and the many people along the way, the latter half of our day's drive would have been cheerless. But, no matter how barren the landscape lay, human life teemed all around us. Maguey is the king of this region. Its fibrous leaves yield filaments which apparently every man, woman and child makes an avocation of spinning into thread. Trotting along the road, with the inevitable burden on back or head, there was hardly a person who did not also carry a hunk of fiber and a rude distaff. As automatic as walking or breathing was the motion of the spindle. Some of the women were even weaving a coarse hempen cloth.

The chief function of maguey, however, is to be distilled into *pulque*, the national beverage; and evidences of this industry interested us greatly. As well they might! What could one make of an Indian hurrying by with the skinned and bloated carcass of

a pig on his back? Two swollen legs stuck out over his shoulders, two above his hips, the distended body lay along his back. Horrible enough in itself, this apparition became nauseating when it was explained as the container of *pulque*. And, horror on horror, one of our guidebooks stated that the pig skins were turned inside out and the hair left on them in order to impart a peculiarly delicious flavor to the drink. Frankly, I do not believe that. But we certainly lost all desire to experiment with *pulque*.

Some of the towns and cities tempted us to stop. They looked very picturesque, huddled around their huge churches, and the guidebook informed us that traces of early Indian art remain here and there on their walls. Especially did it seem a pity not to explore Actopan, a center of religious activity in the old days and still full of churches and convents built by Cortez. But we were growing tired, and the road stretched long before us with Mexico City at its end, Mexico City, famous for traffic troubles. We must conserve both the daylight and our energy.

We did stop, however, at Kilometro 90. Not altogether because it was the highest point on the road between the Rio Grande and Mexico City, but also because the members of the American Colony have here erected an impressive monument to peace and friendliness.

Prompted once more by the guidebook, at Kilometro 75 we began searching the distant horizon for a first glimpse of Popocatepetl. It was slow in coming because there was now a slight haze in the air; and

when we finally saw it, we realized that we must have been looking at it for some time without distinguishing its outlines from the clouds around it. So that our introduction to this notable peak failed of dramatic impact. It lay far away and low against the sky, instead of starting up into the zenith as we had expected. We were even at first uncertain which was Popo and which his consort, the beautiful "sleeping woman," Ixtlaccihautl; and, when, after much discussion and comparing of memories derived from our youthful geography books, we had agreed on the respective identities, we also agreed that Ixtla was the finer of the two.

Just north of Mexico City, in the bed of the old lake bottom, now drained, we were much interested in big grain and stock haciendas. They dated back to colonial days and explained part of the importance of Mexico to the so-called "mother country," Spain. The contrast between their fertility and the desert was striking.

The nearer we drew to Mexico City, the more silent we became. Not for worlds would we admit it to ourselves or each other, but the entrance into this renowned tangle of streets was beginning to worry us.

We had decided that we would drive first to a well-known motor court on the outskirts of the city. Not, unfortunately, on the side of our entrance. Maps and guidebooks, earnestly studied, gave no indication of lodgings here. But a map of the city showed our destination so clearly that we had had no trouble in tracing a red pencil route thither with a minimum

of turns. The accepted plan of procedure was for me to hold this marked map in my lap and direct Christopher.

All very well. If our car were an intelligent insect traversing a page of paper, it would infallibly arrive; but the difference between diagrams and reality is just all the difference in the world. Moreover, in its efforts to explain and encourage, the text of our map had alarmed me. There were so many things to remember. When the traffic policeman stands sidewise, you must STOP. When he turns his back or his face, you must GO. Meantime, it is very important that you watch the gestures of his hands, for they too are admonitory. A small arrow in a green light indicates a right- or left-hand turn. At some intricate corners there are several traffic lights which must be obeyed according to the direction you wish to pursue; and, if you don't know this direction beforehand, you are just out of luck. Practically every downtown street is "one way" and is marked with an arrow-shaped board bearing the word "Transito"; but as this board is laid flat against the wall of the corner building, it cannot be seen until too late to turn.

The net result of all this explicit advice was a deepening silence and a tightening tension as we drew near Mexico City.

Not too near, however; not even near enough for the turning of the last screw of anxiety. Open desert seemed still around us when an officer stepped out from a small police station beside the road and asked to see our papers.

"Have you ever driven in Mexico City?" he inquired when we had passed his inspection and received his rubber stamp.

"No," replied Christopher as jauntily as possible.

"Well," continued the officer, "you probably know that it's a confusing city. The names of the streets change very often and so do the traffic lanes. Wouldn't you like to have one of our guides drive you to your hotel? There's no charge for his service, and you can trust him entirely."

Christopher and I did not even have to glance at each other consultingly. This was an occasion which made discretion seem one hundred parts of valor. With but a single gesture, we moved as far to the right of the front seat as we could, and presently welcomed a slim young man who slid under our wheel and put his foot on our starter with an air of authority.

His name was Ramon, and in no time at all he was our friend. Literally, before the end of the first half-mile, we were all three talking at once. It is not often that anyone jumps into a human relationship so promptly; and, recalling the experience now, I still feel exhilarated by it. The abruptness of our own relief from tension had undoubtedly something to do with the circumstance, but Ramon's intelligence had much more. Having spent a year in New York and attended school there, he spoke English fluently, if a little quaintly. Having only a slight mixture of anything but pure Indian blood in his veins, he liked our interest in the Mexican aborigines. Being a law student, ekeing out his tuition by occasional jobs as a

guide, he could give us a slant on Mexican affairs which we had not received before. The result was a full spate of questions and answers, and finally a prolonged discussion of the probable origin of the Indian race.

This was getting deeper and deeper between Ramon and Christopher, and I had withdrawn from it in order to watch the way we were going and marvel at the intricacy of the turns we were taking and the increasing confusion of the traffic around us, when suddenly, just as we should have leaped forward at a green light, our car succumbed to a recurrence of its San Antonio complex and refused to budge.

"By the lost island of Mu!" "By Bering Straits!" said Christopher and Ramon simultaneously; then stopped as abruptly as if their words had been maledictory instead of purely conversational.

Ramon's face darkened. He pulled out the choke and the throttle and ground furiously at the starter. We could have told him this would do no good, but realized that the negative information wouldn't do any good either. Moreover, we were all completely silenced and deafened by a wild blaring of horns fit for judgment day. A highly unfavorable judgment too. For once, we were glad we did not understand Spanish. And glad beyond any expression was Christopher not to be at the wheel of his car.

Ramon's reactions were agile. Perceiving that there was some real trouble here, he thrust his hand from the car window, waving the traffic onward, and shouted to a policeman who also set his arms in motion

to restore the interrupted progress. Then: "A-ah!" said Ramon, with a glance at the gas register and a half glance at Christopher which seriously imperiled the harmony of our budding friendship.

Now it is one of Christopher's few perversities that he never will get his gas tank filled until it is quite empty. In fairness, I must hasten to add that, only once in at least three hundred thousand miles of travel, has this habit of delay involved us in difficulty. Also that, on one triumphant occasion, we drove thirty miles on what the gauge needle recorded as an empty tank. Nevertheless, the habit worried me and, in the present emergency, my eyes followed Ramon's with dismay.

But, "No!" stated Christopher firmly. "I've been watching that gauge and I know my car. There's plenty of gas to take us to Shirley Courts."

"With your permission, however," said Ramon, still very polite but distinctly less cordial than five minutes before, "I'll get a few liters from a station down the street. Two pesos, please. Thank you, sir."

While he was gone and while Christopher and a policeman lifted both flaps of the hood of the car and peered intently thereunder, I tried to divert my mind by observing the scene around us. There was plenty of it. Trucks and busses, coaches, sedans, limousines, roadsters, an ambulance, a huckster's cart, several baby carriages, a wheelbarrow: these various vehicles progressed on both sides of our car with amazing speed and skill. But most surprising of all was the

delivery of the day's sales from a furniture store in the vicinity. This was made in the good old Mexican fashion on the backs of Indian porters. Edging along through the traffic came a wardrobe with mirrors and drawers. Not far behind it, a sofa advanced; and, behind that, a dining-room table. All these articles had their feet in the air; yet their motion seemed spontaneous until they came near enough to reveal two thin brown human legs under each one. I was filled with indignant compassion, but also with admiration. How was it possible for a man, bent almost double and laboring hard, to carry such awkward objects through a milling throng? During a change of traffic lights, a wardrobe waited directly in front of our car, with its mirror tilted at a convenient angle. "Now look at yourself," I admonished the stubborn creature, "and be ashamed of acting this way when even a wardrobe knows better."

However, I should have been sorry if this rebuke had taken effect immediately on Ramon's return with the gas, for the inference would have been damnifying to Christopher. I drew a sigh of relief when, even with its needle well above zero, the car still refused to start. Ramon's eyes and voice became cordial again; and, removing his coat, he set himself to grapple with the mysterious difficulty. For several minutes he and Christopher, watched and advised by an increasing though fluid group of spectators, searched and prodded and tinkered under the engine hood, while the traffic surged by.

At last a small truck halted directly behind us.

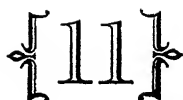
How about pushing, its driver inquired. "*Si! Si!*" replied Ramon, and "*Si-si-si!*" echoed the crowd.

It was a brilliant suggestion, so quickly made and accepted that poor Christopher, just then in the act of dispensing largesse to five or six people, backed hastily under a bedstead as the car moved away from him; and, looking after it, saw his wife and Ramon and all his immediate possessions disappear into a side street. Coatless and hatless, with only a bag of tools in his hand, he sprinted after the propelling truck, but rounded the corner just in time to see the cortege take another turn. Block after block, corner after corner did Christopher negotiate for the next five minutes, dodging cupboards and washstands, upsetting apple carts, leaping burros, until at last the truck halted before the Hotel Regis, near which could be seen the signboard of a Chevrolet garage. Our troubles, except for more largesse, were over for the day.

Caviling critics, hearing this tale of our entrance into Mexico City, have suggested an expedient relation between Ramon and the Hotel Regis; and to them it gave me great pleasure to state that the hotel of Ramon's special allegiance was the Empire. Moreover, he was under official orders to deliver us at Shirley Courts; and, failing to do so, he had to obtain our signatures to an explanation. Everything was square and aboveboard except in our car's behavior. That stubborn vehicle, being examined and tested by the garage mechanics, showed no flaw, no lack, no displacement; and purred so sweetly and smoothly

the next morning that nobody believed there had ever been anything wrong. Only Ramon knew better; and, to our relief, his interest in us seemed rather enhanced than impaired by the idiosyncrasies of the car we had brought into Mexico.

At our request, he came to our hotel soon after breakfast and drove us to the edge of the city where the road to Cuernavaca begins. We were all in agreement that a smaller town at a lower altitude would give us a wise initiation into the Mexican plateau. But we would return to Mexico City and then we should see him again.



BECAUSE OF THE triple influence of fatigue, excitement and altitude, we had not slept well; and we were tired as we turned our backs on Mexico City. But, all things considered, a relaxed and passive mood is not a bad one in which to drive to Cuernavaca. Especially when joy of escape sends a warm glow through one's veins. We were not so fatuous as to pass judgment on Mexico City after spending sixteen hours there, nine of them in bed; but our brief experience had culminated in satiety. It seemed very good to us to slip quietly out into the open country and down two or three thousand feet in space.

The country was beautiful. Not to such a delirious degree as the region between Tamazunchale and Jacala, but we liked it the better for that. The mountains stood farther back and ranged themselves in a more orderly fashion; their uniform garments of oak and pine invested them graciously. There was peace in their contours. And yet their presiding genius was a volcano. At every turn in the road we saw the two snow-crowned peaks, Popo and Ixtla, grandly aloof and exalted but so gentle in their aspect that we understood more and more fully the affectionate familiarity the Indians feel with them.

"Just what is their legend?" asked Christopher.

"Well," I replied, "I think Popocatepetl was a prince who fought for Ixtlaccihauhtl and won her, only to lose her by her untimely death. So then he placed her body on a bier and sat down beside her to keep a candle lighted. Gradually the snow covered them both, but the candle still burns."

"Does it really?" Christopher challenged, after a pause of respect for this pretty story.

"That I can't tell you," I answered. "I've watched and watched for a puff of smoke, but have seen nothing but cloud."

"Perhaps he's joined her in her long sleep and whatever comes after," suggested Christopher.

"Let's hope so," I agreed.

Next to Mexico City, there is probably no Mexican town better known to the reading and traveling public than Cuernavaca. Almost everyone even knows how to pronounce it. And its reputation is glamorous. The Aztec princes had homes here, so had Cortez (who owned the entire town), so had Maximilian, so had Dwight Morrow. Therefore, when our road surmounted a high range of mountains, we paused and looked down at the group of houses lying twenty-five hundred feet below.

The place seemed much bigger than we had expected and with nothing outstandingly attractive in its general appearance. Beautiful in situation, however. The snow mountains stood very near it and must be visible from every street and window. We would go down and see what it had to offer. Half an hour later, we were making our way through

narrow streets and between blocks of houses which resembled those in Monterrey, except that they were on a smaller scale.

When in doubt in a Mexican town, it is generally wise to head for the plaza. There always is one, and it is always centrally placed and surrounded by the most important buildings. Shady and cool too beneath the wide branches of the ubiquitous laurel, most civic-minded of Mexican trees, even more so than the elm in New England. So, twisting carefully and bumping with caution over the cobbles of a steep, tortuous roadway, we emerged into the Cuernavaca plaza, and parked our car before the Hotel Marik.

At once we were assailed by small boys.

"Wash your car!" "Wash your car!" "No, me!" "Me, signore!" "Me first!" "Me wash your car!"

The crowding tumult was bewildering.

"But it doesn't need washing," Christopher answered after a hasty glance to make sure that no inadvertent blemish had befallen our Chevy. And some blemish it would have had to be to call forth such concern from a group of Mexican urchins. Then a gleam of enlightenment woke in his eyes, and he grinned cheerfully.

"Oh, I get you. It's watch you mean. You want to watch our car while we have lunch. Well, you see, I was planning to lock it. So I shan't need you. Thank you just the same."

Whereupon, with a whoop of good nature, the youngsters changed their litany to the familiar "'Allo Good-by!" adding a significant "Fi cents."

"That was clever in you, Christopher," I remarked as we shook ourselves free of the clinging boys and then of two other onslaughts, the one wanting to black our shoes, the other to sell us post cards. "How could you ever have guessed?"

"Didn't," admitted Christopher. "Just remembered something I'd heard or read about a racket of watching cars for their owners. Some people fall for it, I believe, but personally I don't like the principle."

"Or the inference, either," I replied, rather dubiously.

This reception set us against Cuernavaca, and our initial misgivings were promptly reinforced by successive impressions. The noble old plaza was one of the finest we had seen, but it was full of traps for tourists: booths of cheap souvenirs, hawkers of "*curiosidades*," vendors of post cards. And plenty of tourists themselves, more than we had yet seen anywhere at the same time together in Mexico.

Now I know there is something insufferably self-complacent about the foreigner who, a rank tourist himself, looks on all other tourists as anathema. He is as bad as the psalmist, declaiming, "Let them be blotted out of the book of the living . . . but let thy salvation, O God, set me up on high." Nevertheless, the regret, if not the hatred, is natural. One does not travel three thousand miles to see the same things and the same people one left at home. Foreignness is what one wants to experience in a foreign land. The argument is analogous to that which prevailed in

Vermont when the Green Mountain Parkway controversy was in full swing. "If you love the wilderness, you ought to want to share it with other people." "Yes, but when a lot of people visit a wilderness, they automatically destroy it. Nobody can have it then." The problem is a difficult one, to which I don't know the answer. I can only state unrepentantly that, when I encounter a picnic in a wood, I turn the other way, and, when in a foreign city I glimpse a crowd of United States tourists, I leave the field to them.

Since the street by which we had reached the Cuernavaca plaza was certainly foreign enough to discourage impairment, we retreated to it. At once we were reassured by a sound which in Tamazunchale had become very familiar, one of the oldest sounds in the world: that of the patting of tortillas. Some Indian woman was preparing a midday meal for her family, just as all her ancestral mothers had prepared it. Back and back and back; before Columbus, before Vespucci, before Caesar or Ptolemy or perhaps even Moses. Greatly cheered, we stopped to look in at the open door whence the ancient noise issued, and found, not one woman but five of them, all in clean Sears Roebuck dresses, with their hair waved and their fingernails tinted. They were chattering Spanish and their skins were dark; otherwise, they might have been any group of gringa women in a bakery. They were working for customers, among whom they evidently counted us, for one of them motioned toward a table piled with fresh tortillas. How many did we want? We shook our heads and withdrew.

However, I realize that our disappointment in this episode was unjust. Nothing can injure the venerable integrity of tortilla making, and the method employed by these twentieth-century women was doubtless precisely the same as that used by Ptolemy's obscure contemporaries: the identical process of kneading corn and water into a huge golden ball, then either rolling it out in a wide sheet over one arm or patting small bits of it very thin between the palms of the hands. The flat pans of tin laid over coals for the baking were not immemorial, for of course hot stones had preceded them. But the whole business was thoroughly Indian. And the result, I may add, was the only product of Mexican cooking which we liked.

Disheartened by the curio shops and the department stores, we returned to the Hotel Marick for lunch. Here we frankly abjured foreignness and antiquity and, returning to the amenities of our civilization, enjoyed such a measure of them as only the fall of the peso could have made possible for us. Sitting at a charmingly decked table, on a verandah, above a green-tiled swimming pool in a blossoming garden, we ate a delicious luncheon and thought that this would be a delightful place in which to spend the winter, if one were willing to be only occasionally reminded that one was not in California.

When we emerged from the hotel, our car was quite unattended; but the minute we descended the steps, four boys sprang at our windshield and windows and began rubbing them with dingy bits of cloth.

"I wash your car!" "I wash your car!" they chanted antiphonally.

"Little pests!" laughed Christopher, clearing them briskly from the running board.

But their prompt, unresentful "'Allo Good-by Fi Cents" won him over this time, and he scattered a handful of coins from the window, thereby shamelessly falling in with the process of demoralization.

Much more shameful than shameless was our departure from Cuernavaca after such a brief glimpse, and we knew it. We promised each other to return. But, just at present, our desire was to find a place in which to settle down as we had done in Tamazunchale; and, since a gringo winter resort did not tempt us, we decided to take a look at Taxco.

The hour was now that of the national siesta, and we had the bright world pretty much to ourselves as we drove along over the glaring road through the torrid air. I myself craved a siesta; in fact, I'm not sure that I didn't take one. Certainly I remember little of the details of the landscape for several miles below Cuernavaca. Rolling country, I think, with distant mountains and with Popo and Ixtla behind us and so out of the picture. Sunshine and heat. Heat!

But when we plunged into a bevy of hills and began soaring and winding in the familiar Pan American fashion, I roused myself, shook off my lethargy, and came to a sharp attention. Hills rather than mountains were these among which we went swinging, though probably in New England they would

have been super-ranges. If indeed that can be called a range the component parts of which tumble in every direction. Covered with verdure and suave in contour, they were undisturbing enough, yet they gave an impression of restlessness.

For a little while, perhaps half an hour, the road made a very fair imitation of the highway near Jacala, though on a smaller scale; and we began to wonder whether Taxco was an eyrie, when suddenly the fabulous town came in sight right ahead of us. With one accord, we said, "Oh, look!" and sat up very straight.

It is probably sufficiently clear to any readers we may have that Christopher and I, though not suspicious by nature, have been rendered fairly so by experience. We no longer take things for granted and are always on our guard against disillusionment. When I say therefore that our reaction to Taxco was one of complete incredulity but of immediate admiration, the effect of the little city may be understood. There is real magic about it.

Seen thus from a distance, it clings to the sides and rests in the hollows of a steep hill. Very much like an Italian hill town, but with a difference. Siena and Orvieto, as I remember them, give a substantial impression of grayness. Taxco's red-tiled roofs, viewed through half-closed eyes, look like a broken, windy sunset. I don't know on how many separate hills it is built, nor how many churches it has, but one supreme peak and one regnant cathedral dominate everything. I may as well say at once that, with

Taxco in clear sight before me, I did not believe it existed; nor do I believe it now, after having lived there two weeks and remembered it six months.

Yet its history is explicit enough. Unlike Tama-zunchale, it is not of Indian origin. Cortez found silver here in 1522, and, when the mines were opened, a Spanish town grew up around them. Then, in the seventeen-hundreds, a Frenchman named Borda made and lost and made again a huge fortune from the mines. The result of this unity of function has been a unity of impression. Though the adobe houses vary in size and shape, they conform to one general standard, and all their roofs are tiled with red. The incredibly steep narrow streets are cobbled with stones which, here and there, are arranged in patterns: a star or a bull or a conventional design. Carelessly flung at the hillside though it appears, there is nothing haphazard about Taxco. It is a work of art. Instinctively so to begin with, but now deliberately preserved by the Mexican Government which has made it a colonial monument. Something like our Williamsburg, but with the great advantage of uninterrupted vitality.

All cars approach Taxco slowly because of the steep grades, but a gradual arrival does not save them from crowning bewilderment. Grinding up a cobbled acclivity, we found ourselves at a sudden crossroads, the turn to the left shooting up into the air, that to the right taking a header downwards. Perceiving our hesitation, three youngsters mounted the running board and delivered shrill advice which confused us still further; ~~so~~ that, rejecting both crossroads and

proceeding straight ahead, we nearly drove over the unguarded edge of a cliff.

"I think I saw a signboard pointing down the hill to the right," I said, catching my breath as the car came abruptly to a halt. "Back up and see what it says."

But when we saw that it bore the name of the very hotel which had been recommended to us, our original hesitation deepened.

"A hotel down there?" Christopher murmured, plumbing the depths below him with a dubious eye.

"*Si, si, signore,*" the urchins urged, still clinging to the car.

"Well, all right then, here goes!" said Christopher; and, putting the gears into low and his foot on the brake, he maneuvered our Chevy into the nose-diving posture of a fly on a wall. Nor did any ledge offer a landing place until, arriving at the terraced inn, we had driven around it and come to a stop on a battlemented parking space. Here, I may add, the Chevy reposed, undisturbed and undesired, for the two weeks of our stay.

It was not the habitual entrance, but the hotel proprietor met us at the back door as genially as if we had taken the proper detour to the office, and welcomed us to the only room he had vacant.

This was sheer luck, and we did not deserve it; for most people make reservations well in advance. And to have missed our fortnight at this exceedingly popular inn would have been to have missed one of the pleasantest chapters of our experience.

The delightful hostelry has developed from one of the old colonial mansions, and, lying on many levels, it looks over the red-tiled roofs to the dominating cathedral and out in the other direction to the surrounding hills. It has gardens and fountains, lawns, patios, cool cloistered verandahs, sun-flooded flat roofs, short flights of stone steps and quaint stone figures. One window of our big room overhung the steep street, the other looked out into a sunny patio. When the weather permitted, which was almost always, breakfasts and lunches were served outdoors, dinner was served in a huge room warmed by a blazing open fire. The food was excellent. Since host and hostess are New Englanders, the menus were mostly those of the United States; but since all the servants are local, the cooking was Mexican. Most of the guests were gringo too, and we made some pleasant friends among them.

Altogether, I repeat, we were in the best of luck when we found a room vacant in the Taxquén and proceeded to occupy it. Though, at the time, I was so hot and so tired that my appreciation stopped short at the shower bath and the bed. On the latter I lay inert for the rest of the afternoon.

{ 12 }

WHEN CHRISTOPHER came in to freshen up for dinner, I knew at once, from the look on his face, that he had been having an uncommonly good time, and I was assailed by unreasonable regrets.

"Fiesta," he told me. Then, as I made an exclamation (for missing a Mexican fiesta was indeed something to be regretted), he added consolingly, "It's just begun and it's going to last four days. If you feel like it, we'll go up again after dinner."

Once more luck was with us. This January fiesta celebrated the two patron saints of the cathedral and was therefore one of the most important in the year. Whatever may be the shortcomings of Mexican methods in some directions, they are thoroughly reliable where fiestas are concerned; and only a deaf, blind and bedridden person could miss one entirely. Moreover, there was no hurry. Never, never, no matter what the apparent pressure and exigency, is there any hurry in Mexico.

So, "Take your time," counseled Christopher, already imbued with the latter truth, as, after dinner, we started for the cathedral. Hearing bells in the distance, I had set forth at a brisk pace.

I was glad to obey him; for, though the dusk of the evening favored my first ascent of the hill by conceal-

ing its steepness, my feet felt strangely up-ended and my breath soon gave out.

"It's not so bad if you walk sidewise," Christopher continued, putting a hand under my elbow. "And presently there'll be a stretch of unpaved road on one edge where you can get a purchase."

"What's the cobblestone theory, anyway?" I gasped, slipping and stumbling.

"Shoemaker's tactics," replied Christopher.

But just then two Mexicans passed us on their way up, moving slowly but easily, holding themselves very straight, and we could see in the moonlight that their feet were bare.

The enormous Taxco cathedral and the plaza before it occupy very snugly a sort of plateau about halfway up the hill to which the town is grappled. But, even so, the rear and sides of the cathedral are supported by heavy walls of masonry. It soared so hugely above us as we emerged from the narrow street into the crowded plaza, that, with our heads laid back on our shoulders, we could hardly trace the outline of the towers against the sky; and the immediately impending mass of the façade was overpowering. Not a pleasant impression. But I had never expected to care much for the Taxco cathedral, so many, many ornate pictures of which I had seen. It is baroque at its most extravagant, and I did not then like baroque.

The brightly lighted plaza was almost as hard to see as the church, for the reason that it was densely crowded with a milling throng. At least, however, its effect was vivid. Arm in arm, we joined the pro-

cession revolving around the bandstand in the center, and let our attention receive the impact of swiftly succeeding details. Young men in gay *sarapes*. Girls in *mantillas*, with flowers in their hair. Tourists, of course; but we ignored them, hoping that they would do the same by us. Lots of children, either hand in hand with each other or trailing along beside parents. Many preoccupied dogs. A scattering of Indians, apparently from outlying villages; very similar in type and attire to those in Tamazunchale, but not quite so poor.

There were two lines in the procession, and they revolved in opposite directions, the one composed mostly of men, the other of women and girls. Brought face to face thus in rhythmic motion, the sexes studied each other without appearing to do so and without committing themselves; until, by and by, here and there, a man would drop out from his line and offer his arm to a woman, reversing his orbit. So that gradually the feminine line became mixed. Yet it was never crowded; for, after walking awhile together, the couple would slip out into a third irregular inner circle of dancers who wheeled slowly and silently about the bandstand.

Meantime, the music

Now what shall I say about the Mexican music? It cast such a spell upon me that we soon escaped from our orbit and found a place where we could stand and listen and look.

These players were very different to look at from a smartly uniformed band in the United States. They

wore motley garments, some of them ragged and soiled. Those who did not need their mouths for their instruments were smoking cigarettes; and I dare say many of them had bare feet. A casual lot, apparently gathered at random from the street. But the way they played betokened either a genius for spontaneous harmony or many patient rehearsals.

The music too was as different from United States band music as could be imagined: plaintive and broken, irregular, full of strange rhythms and cadences, sad with a hopeless kind of melancholy but entirely tender and sweet. I'm afraid that sounds sentimental, but the music was not in the least so. It seemed to me like the expression of a very old racial intelligence, musing over intolerable wrongs which it had learned how to transmute into beauty. Like a prisoner groping among the débris in his cell and finding bits of rare jewels. Like the song of Ruth. The men at their instruments threw back their heads and half closed their eyes.

Well, I thought as I listened, it may be that all our accepted values are wrong; that success and independence are not nearly so desirable as failure and subjection. For surely a nation would, in the long run, rather create beautiful music than build an empire. Surely these barefooted Mexicans were happier releasing their souls in these poignant strains than blaring triumphal marches made to order for them. Even the sense of futility left by the music, breaking off as inconsequentially as it had started, was acceptable. Futility is the hallmark of our age; and in

its weakness we shall perhaps by and by find ourselves made strong again.

More deeply moved than I cared to admit, I sat down on the empty end of a bench and propped my chin in my hand.

No sooner, however, had I thus prepared myself for a session of meditation than the whole mood of the plaza changed. The musicians came down from the bandstand, the revolving circles broke up, and many of the dancing couples ran to find places in a very different kind of orbit made by a carrousel. Gathering myself together, I fell in with Christopher's suggestion that we likewise transfer our attention to the new form of amusement.

The Tamazunchale carrousel had been a sedate affair, composed of papier-maché animals on a level platform. The whirligig at Taxco was made of baskets attached by long ropes to the top of a very tall stout pole. Into each of these loose-hanging baskets a single individual was strapped. A tame and cosy arrangement it seemed at first sight, a flock of Mexicans swaying together in a neighborly bunch. But then the music started, not plaintive this time but wild and lilting, and the pole began to turn. Slowly the baskets swung free from each other and out from the pole, steadily they climbed the air. With each strong rotation they surged farther and higher until the once vertical ropes were almost horizontal. Their motion was rhythmic, like that of the planets in the New York Planetarium. The flying people gathered their feet close under, as birds

in flight gather their claws, and spread their arms wide in the meshes to which they were clinging. Perhaps they felt a little like birds, only under a deeper impulsion, more irresistible. Like blood pulsing out from the heart. Like waves rolling in from the sea. Something cosmic at any rate, something which they could not resist and in which they found a deep reconciling rapture. Destiny again. In thus listening to Mexican music and watching a Mexican carrousel, I felt that I had caught a glimpse into Mexican ontology.

But there were other aspects. At one end of the wide platform before the church a play was in progress, and our next move brought us into the shifting audience. We found it very similar to the drama which we had witnessed in San Antonio: the same mechanical gestures, the same ranting dialogues, the same theme of conflict. Only here the explicit issue was political rather than religious. Apparently these Taxcans were dramatizing the conquest of their country by Cortez. How they could do this so cheerfully we could not understand. The man who impersonated Montezuma had a cigarette in his mouth all the time Cortez was railing and lunging at him; and, though he removed it when he fell dead, he replaced it immediately. The Indian captives accepted their chains with gleeful alacrity. The truth must be, we concluded, either that drama did not search them so deeply as other forms of expression, or that the racial mixture was here preponderantly Spanish. As in San Antonio, the play proved much

too long for us, and we turned away before it was half over. If indeed a play like this is ever finished. Perhaps it just goes on and on before an ever shifting audience.

In one corner of the plaza were some strange erections which puzzled us. They resembled a series of enormous baskets, like wicker crates for fowls, placed one above another on a tall pole. When we were told they were fireworks, we could not have been more astonished if they had been called bathtubs or pianos. Skeptically but politely we asked, "When will they be set off?" "About midnight," we were assured.

Now by this time we were very tired. The strain of two days of sharply keyed-up attention, combined with changing altitudes and temperatures and the fatigue of driving, had brought us to a familiar point of satiety. As had happened so often before with us, we had had enough. Therefore, on consulting Christopher's watch and finding that the hour was nine-fifteen, we deliberately turned our backs on those improbable fireworks and started towards our inn. The action was one which in retrospect I deplore. Could we not have endured two hours and a half of weariness? Could we not, like many of the Mexicans, have curled up in a corner somewhere and gone to sleep? But I know the answer is: no, we could not. When brain and body reel and every sense goes on a sit-down strike, there is nothing to do but capitulate. Even ten minutes more would have impaired the effect of what we had already seen.

Not of what we did still see, however, by way

of unexpected recompense. We had the street and the moon to ourselves as, escaping from the noisy plaza, we wandered slowly downward, enjoying the sudden silence and the great night space above us. We fell silent too. But presently, "Look!" said Christopher, stopping and turning me slightly with a hand on my arm. Beside and above us rose the dim gray outline of a little church. Its lines were simpler than those of most Mexican churches, and its square tower stood up in Orion as if belonging there. Moonlight enfolded it softly. At no other moment could we have seen it precisely thus, and there was something about the serene revelation which made it worth all the fireworks in the world. Hushed and exalted, we skidded down the hill, ran up against the rescuing wall of our patio, and, gathering ourselves together, went happily to bed.

Yet, even in this instance, Mexican openhandedness refused to hold us to the bargain. We had paid a certain price to see a little church translated into Orion. Very well, we should now have our money back. At breakfast the next morning, some people sitting near us first pitied us for having missed the amazing fireworks, then consoled us by the information that there would be more this evening. Eating your cake and having it too is a Mexican specialty.

So far as Christopher was concerned, there was only one answer to the question: what should be done with this first day in Taxco? Paint. As soon as breakfast was over, he was off and away. But for me there were several choices. In order to consider

them quietly, I left the hotel and slowly, oh, very slowly, climbed the hill toward the plaza. In the brilliant sunlight the pitch was apparent as so nearly vertical that I marveled at the comparative ease with which we had mounted it the evening before. Yet, now as then, there were Mexicans taking it in a competent stride. And, to my complete amazement, I was presently warned to one side by the horn of a motor car backing up. That had the effect of a nightmare. I fled from those rearing hindquarters advancing on me, and took sudden refuge on a bench in a tiny plaza halfway up the hill. To my comfort I discovered that the little church of Orion stood near and I settled down to enjoy it in its daytime setting.

There was a public fountain here too, one of the many which stand in the streets of Taxco and carry on the comparison of the small city with Rome. It reminded me of the wide basin in the Pincian Gardens; but, beyond it, instead of the dome of Saint Peter's, one saw the toppling towers of San Sebastian and Santa Prisca.

They were enormous, those towers. They and the church which they surmounted seemed out of all proportion not only to the town but also to the landscape. And not very beautiful either, save in their soft glowing color. The whole mass was huge and clumsy. I had never expected to like it, but I disliked it more positively than I had feared. How much better in every way seemed the simple little gray church beside me. I glanced at it affectionately,

remembering last evening's revelation, and found it very good to be here.

There was something compelling, however, about the cathedral whose annual hour this was; and my eyes returned to it constantly from the gray burros and the women and children bearing water cans to the fountain. At last I got up and pursued my way to the central plaza. After all, it was probably there that Taxco could be best understood.

The grade of the street was less steep now; and, though the cobbles were as rough as ever, I walked more easily and had more attention to spare for the houses along the way. From the open door of one came the familiar pat-pat of tortillas; from another came a similar sound which yet was different. Glancing in, I saw a couple of Indians at work with small hammers behind a bench strewn with fragments of silver. They looked very cheerful and busy, intent on an occupation which was almost as old as that of the women across the way. There were Aztec designs in the finished jewelry exposed in the shop window.

More and more of these shops were in evidence as the street neared the main plaza; and on the edge of the plaza itself was a large and famous establishment where Indians make not only silver articles but rugs and *sarapes*, baskets and chairs. An air of quiet but thriving industry pervaded the quarter.

Because of the fiesta, the plaza was abnormally crowded with booths, with stands for refreshments, with raffle boards, with the carrousel, with the litter

and clutter caused by the presence of many people. I therefore decided to postpone the impression presumably made by the great laurels when the space beneath and between them was less encumbered, and went at once to the cathedral where, for the moment, no ceremony seemed in progress. Not liking the exterior, I might possibly find the interior more congenial to my taste.

Never was there a more riotous disappointment. Stepping inside the great doorway, I anticipated the dim lofty coolness which, in our northern tradition, pertains to places of worship, and found exuberant pillars, an altar so encrusted with ornament that it dripped garlands and cherubs, a roof fretted and tortured into knobby excrescences, side chapels bursting with saints and angels, more saints in niches along the walls, and almost everything executed in what looked like pure gold. The effect was stupendous. I recoiled from it, and hastily sat down on a bench against the rear wall. Instead of some appropriate words from the Bible, my mind muttered, "Heavy, heavy hangs over thy head." Oh, very heavy! Suppose that robust angel striding about the roof were to miss his step and fall into my lap. I really thought I was going to hate the Taxco cathedral.

But, just for that reason and since I was there, I decided to spend the morning observing it carefully.

By way of beginning, I pulled a small book from my handbag and read how Jose Borda came to Mexico in the early eighteenth century and made a large fortune from the silver mines near Taxco; how

he lost this fortune and, hoping to recover it, promised the Heavenly Powers to build them the finest church in the new world if they would help him. The Taxco cathedral was the result.

Well, that went far toward explaining the lavish outlay of gold leaf. He certainly kept his promise, did this Jose Borda. And even the vulgarity of the extravagant ornamentation suited the situation, for the hardheaded bargain was not precisely what one would call refined. In fact, the wonder is that anything really spiritual resulted from such a mundane reimbursement.

Much better did I like the other story my book told me about the Virgin Mary who, seeing the nearly completed cathedral in danger from a violent thunderstorm, came and caught the shafts of lightning in her hands. If one does not believe this, one has only to look at the high altar in whose reredos the gentle Lady still stands with both hands full of jagged streaks.

Having finished my reading, I rose and began a slow circuit of the church. Though there was no service in progress, people were kneeling here and there, or just standing or sitting, lost in meditation. Their faces were wistful and wondering. I tried not to disturb them. Some of the objects of their veneration struck me as strangely unworthy of such deep respect: madonnas dressed in frivolous garments, with earrings and high-heeled slippers; martyrs dying slowly in pink lace-edged rayon bloomers; a jaunty burro bearing Jesus to Jerusalem; an unspeakably bloody image in a glass coffin; crucifixes so realistic

that I could hardly bear to glance at them. Was there, I wondered, an Aztec survival of the idea of human sacrifice in some of these things? And, if so, was it not legitimate? The farther back religion reaches, the deeper rooted it is. As for the gewgaws and the homely garments, they probably serve to bring the divine close to the human.

One thing I missed in the cathedral and, now that I came to think of it, in the streets of Taxco: the presence of priests. They may have been there; I suppose they were, for masses were said every day. But, under the present political dispensation, they are not allowed to wear their clerical garments except in actual service. This robs the place of an element which it needs to complete its significance. Mexico cannot be Mexico without its churches, and no church is itself without a recognized priest.

Take it all in all, my morning spent in the Taxco cathedral was fruitful of tolerance. But still, when I rejoined Christopher at luncheon, I reiterated my dislike of the redundant edifice. And I spent the afternoon quietly and gratefully in the little plaza beside Orion's fane.

That evening we made a prudent delay in returning to the main plaza. The fireworks were scheduled for ten o'clock. But we arrived in time to secure places on the steps of the cathedral.

"No, thank you," I said to one of our fellow countrymen with whom we had climbed the hill. "I think I won't go into the church tonight. To tell the truth, I don't like it very much."

"Really?"

He looked surprised, but he was polite and did not press the matter. Until perhaps five minutes later, when he reappeared and, hesitating disarmingly, said,

"I beg your pardon. You probably know your own mind. But there's a service going on now; the nave is crowded and the altar lighted. I do wish you'd come and see what a difference that makes."

It did indeed, and I owe my fellow traveler a debt of gratitude. Entering from the dusk of the plaza, I found myself suddenly smitten by a blaze of glory which, vulgar or not, had hallelujah in it. The organ was thundering, the congregation singing, frail wreaths of incense floated in the air. The roof and pillars no longer seemed heavy because they were now solidly weighted by a dark mass of humanity. To say that they sprang from this broad pediment would not be accurate, for the baroque does not spring; but at least the whole church stood at ease, fulfilled by the worshipping crowd for which it had been designed.

That experience taught me a lesson in judgment. One must always wait until the very last word has been said.

One must also remember in Mexico that to keep people waiting is a national practice. This truth was brought home to us that very evening when the hour set for the fireworks came and passed. And passed. And passed. And passed.

But one of the queer wicker bundles lay directly before us at the foot of the steps, and we put in some

of the time studying its complexities. It was different from the totem-pole arrangement of the evening before and we thought probably even more interesting. For it was portable.

The asbestos foundation was made in the shape of a bull, hollowed out underneath like a hat. From this rose tiers of straw or bamboo, supporting pin wheels, rockets, and mysterious contraptions unfamiliar to us. The effect of the final explosion was as completely unpredictable as now, looking back on it, I find it indescribable.

When at last the bearer was ready, he lighted a fuse and, lifting the structure, fitted the bull over his head and shoulders. Then he walked out into the crowd. For several minutes nothing happened. A slender line of fire ran up through the lower tier, and a vibrant suspense ran likewise through the hovering people. A whistle here, a cat call there, a hysterical giggle or two. But for the most part, breathless silence. Then suddenly on the edge of the peripatetic bundle, a pin wheel went off, wildly whirring in one direction, reversing to the other, sputtering madly, scattering sparks to all points of the compass. At once the bearer dived headlong among the people and they stormed backward from him, shrieking in a panic which was not altogether assumed. Spinning tongues and spirals of flame issued from another part of the structure, sheets of fire waved fiercely, and the faster his burden burned, the faster the bearer ran about the plaza. The whole place was in pandemonium.

Followed by a sudden respite. When the first tier

of the wickerwork had been completely exploded, the thin flame resumed its reticent progress upward, and a vast sigh escaped from the agitated multitude, recovering from one bout and preparing for another. We on the steps of the cathedral caught our own breath and congratulated ourselves on our slight elevation above and separation from the throng.

But, as if in mocking response to this self-satisfaction, the bull turned his head toward us and began making his way in our direction. Again a sputter, a burst of flame; and straight up the steps came the bull, charging in among us. Wild flames played all about us, sparks showered down on our heads. Pan-American yells of the choicest variety split our eardrums, and once more tumult prevailed.

How many times this happened I really do not know. The chaos of the occasion completely demoralized me by-and-by, and I forgot my body almost to the point of neglecting to breathe. So that I must have resembled a fish out of water. But I kept my wits about me enough to miss nothing of the most amazing display of pyrotechnics I had ever seen. And ever since, I have been aware of an element of wildness and disorder in the Mexican nature which resembles the turmoil of their mountains and must be hard to deal with in any "planned economy."

{13}

TO VISITORS fresh from the United States or even from Mexico City, Taxco seems primitive and quaint. But, compared with Tamazunchale, Christopher and I found it rather sophisticated. There were fewer affable pigs roaming about the streets; and, though chickens stood beside many doorways, they were always tied by the leg. Motor cars, trucks, even busses scaled the most precipitous streets (in low or reverse according to their immediate orientation) and insinuated themselves into the narrowest alleys and around the sharpest curves. Yet there was never any wild scattering out of their way or, so far as I know, any accident while we were there. Mexican drivers are skillful in their recklessness, and Mexican crowds have a way of dissolving instinctively. Like water, parting smoothly before a boat and closing in again behind it.

The Taxco inhabitants were intensely tourist-conscious. In Tamazunchale we had been more often ignored than observed, but here everybody looked at us appraisingly. The children called to us, and in their salutation, "'Allo Good-by" was simply the preface to "Fi Cents." They seemed friendly enough, but seldom disinterestedly so.

This was, however, quite natural. What would happen, we asked ourselves, if our New England village were set aside as a colonial monument and people came flocking to see it? Would the villagers not become very self-conscious and critical? Being exploited, would they not do their best to exploit others? Being on show, would they not demand a share of the box-office receipts? That Taxco ought to be kept inviolate we heartily agreed, for it is an invaluable survival from an age when civic beauty meant more than it does just now. Moreover, the town has the advantage over such similar experiments as the reconstruction of Williamsburg in that it is inherently alive, it grows from a deep sturdy root. Nevertheless, pruning shears can never be used without leaving a trace of artificiality, and exhibits always put the best foot forward.

These reflections interested me rather than Christopher; for, to a painter, beauty is beauty and must be welcomed as such. Every day, all day, he stood before his easel in the plazas or at the street corners, absorbed and happy, until he grew almost as brown as a Mexican; and my explorations were generally made alone.

This was just as well, for the grades took more than all my breath, with none to spare for talk. I am a slow climber even at home, where the hill slopes are gentle; and here in Taxco the wonder was that I ever reached some of my destinations.

I would begin by picking one out from the terrace of our inn. That ramparted pink dome about half-

way up the hill above the main plaza looked like an interesting church. It should be my objective. Donning my stoutest low-heeled shoes, I would sally forth. All would go well as far as the familiar plaza. Then, taking my bearings carefully, I would start up the hill above it by the street which inclined more nearly than any other in my desired direction. At the end of three minutes of desperate resistance to the law of gravity, I would pause to save my heart from bursting, and would find myself in a private patio, or at a sheer impasse, or involved in a crooked maze. The pink-domed church had vanished, leaving no clue.

The first two or three times this happened, I made the mistake (heartbreaking enough in itself) of descending to the plaza and starting afresh. But gradually I discovered that Taxco, being a city of infinite complications, is also one of infinite resources, and that every goal can be reached from any given point.

Once, I remember, my first spurt of climbing landed me in a dooryard where two women were engaged in domestic activities of a highly personal nature. Greatly embarrassed, I backed away. But, "*Derecho, signora!*" one of them said, smiling and waving her comb to indicate that my way lay straight ahead through their patio. And, sure enough, even as she spoke, a burro came stepping lightly from the other direction, followed by a man who greeted the half-clad women unconcernedly. Their dooryard was part of a thoroughfare which, after encircling all

their outhouses and looking in at all their windows, dropped by a flight of steps into a gully, climbed up the other side through another patio, and finally led me to my destination.

On another occasion, I came to a complete dead-end on the edge of a cliff where the cobbles stopped. Nothing for it this time, certainly, but to retrace my steps. In order to make quite sure, however, I turned around slowly and carefully, scanning the huddled environment for a promising crack. As I did so, from over the rim of a rough landslide above me, a woman came walking superbly, a jar of water on her head and two babies in her *reboso*. Such breath as I had, stopped short in my throat as I watched her descend that avalanche, but hers was full and easy enough to sing to the babies and to wish me "*Buenas tardes.*" Since her path was mine in reverse, I must and did take it; but I waited until I was sure she could not look back and observe my frantic ascent.

Once arrived at my goal, however, I was always rewarded by beauty. That of the view to begin with. The red roofs and towers of Taxco below me were like a great handful of jewels flung at a broken surface to roll and lodge where they would. The central mass of the laurels before the cathedral held the separate items together somewhat, but the total effect was one of accident. Then, beyond them, the landscape took up its tale of variety. In the foreground and middle distance, the hills were low and rolling; and, between and beyond them, lay miles

of open space. Nothing was restful, however, for every square yard rode a-tilt, and the plane surfaces slanted in as many directions as the hills. Only the mountain ranges, remote against the sky, sealed the scene with a certain peace; and that, I suppose, was mostly because they were so far away.

The churches which I saw on these gymnastic jaunts of mine were always interesting in one way or another. Sometimes merely because of an ancient façade; sometimes, still more merely, because of a single Indian kneeling before a shrine. To one of them I returned several times, bringing Christopher with me once, for the sake of the crude pictures which papered the wall on both sides of the vestibule. The Virgin Mary apparently took a particular interest in this church and had intervened often to save its parishioners from calamity. One picture showed an Indian and his burro, lost in the desert and rescued at the last gasp by a cohort of angels. Another depicted a man bleeding horribly from a wound in his leg which the Madonna herself was hastening to staunch. There were drawings of women in childbed, children in convulsions, men being run over by automobiles or robbed by bandits or gored by bulls, whole families escaping from houses on fire. But the picture I liked best was of a thatched stable open at one end and displaying the hind quarters of two cows. The vacant space between them and the mournful droop of their tails seemed to indicate the absence of a well-loved third. Outside the stable, on his knees, the owner of the cows was praying

ardently. Above the roof, in a swirl of clouds, the Madonna, attended by several angels, a saint or two, and five or six cherubs, hovered with her Son in her arms. While, beside and a little behind the kneeling farmer, stood the lost cow, regarding him with an expression of infinite tenderness while she waited for him to discover her miraculous return.

The church which both Christopher and I continued to like best was that of our own privately witnessed miracle, the translation into Orion; and we regretted that its door remained locked. But one Sunday afternoon, we saw it open, with people coming and going through it; and on making inquiries, we learned that the members of the parish, unable to secure public funds for necessary repairs, had allowed the church to be closed until they could raise the money themselves, and were now about to celebrate its reopening. Whereupon, of course, we betook ourselves to the tiny plaza beside the church.

We had a long wait, as had everyone else. Apparently a preliminary gathering is part of the proper program of a Mexican ceremony. At any rate, most of the congregation was on the spot a full hour before anything happened at all. There were no signs of impatience or even restlessness. People simply drifted down the street or filtered in from byways and stood in groups chatting or watching. By-and-by, three musicians arrived and took up their stand just before the church door. The music they played was quite similar to that played in the bandstand during the fiesta: plaintive and fragile and helpless. Listening

to it, I marveled again at the maze of bewilderment in which people must be groping to write music like that, and I wondered if Mexico would ever find its way out into the robust estate of a destiny realized.

Little by little, groups of *reboso*-clad women entered the church and sat down on long benches against the walls. Some of them suckled their children, but most of them just sat and waited, their heads and shoulders all alike in the long simple folds of their communal garment. Many of the people, both men and women, brought with them huge candles twined with wreaths of flowers; and, as the daylight faded, these candles were lighted. The result was a stunning picture, seen through the now wide-open doorway outside which we stood. At the end of the dusky church the high altar gleamed softly, and along each side of the nave a motionless row of dark figures held long white tapers crowned with golden spires of flame. "Gosh!" said Christopher under his breath.

By the time the priest arrived, the church was crowded, and people were standing around the door like a thick cluster of bees. Christopher, who is tall, held a Mexican baby on his shoulder, where, I am thankful to say, it behaved with more discretion than some we have observed on their mothers' backs.

The priest was genuine and so was his chasuble, though the latter was shabby; but the acolyte was a layman in everyday clothes. It was the first time we had witnessed this sign of the restrictive demands of the anti-clerical Government, and we deplored it

as petty. Why mar the looks of a function just because you think it foolish? All Mexicans ought to be too artistic for that. Perhaps, however, the wily authorities hope that, by marring looks, they can most easily break an outworn spell. Certain it was that the trousers and cutaway coat, bobbing about the altar, detracted from the dignity of that vesper service.

The ritual of sanctification was faultless, however. The church was quite dark now, and it was through a forest of lighted candles that the priest made his way, flinging drops of holy water over the heads of the people. Outside the door, the troubled music rose to a brief persuasion of felicity; and, beyond and above it, the sound of rockets could be heard. Let political periods come and go, let governments experiment in measures of economy, let worldly wisdom proclaim the final passing of religion; this little church in Taxco had spared no expense and effort to re-establish itself in the good old liturgical ways.

I have dwelt thus exclusively on the churches of Taxco because they supplied almost the only elements for sight-seeing. The one secular building open for inspection was the Humboldt House.

Now there is fame for you! To spend one night in a house on your way somewhere else, and to leave such a gratifying memory that, one hundred and twenty years later, the name of the rightful owner has faded and yours is inscribed in its place! Alexander Humboldt stopped overnight in Taxco on his way from Acapulco to Mexico City, and the mansion

of his brief sojourn is now in process of restoration to the exact condition in which he honored it. But I suspect his prestige is being invoked and polished partly to serve as an excuse for repairing one of the finest old colonial buildings in town. The work is still far from complete, and fresh funds are needed for it; but even the unfinished result is admirable. Three enthusiastic citizens of the United States, with a very young fourth, are living in the house and restoring it, step by step, as means become available. It is a pleasure and a source of stimulating information to talk with them.

Market day in Taxco, as in Tamazunchale, was Sunday; but the function did not greatly interest us here, and we only attended it once. Perhaps we were rendered indifferent by the scarcity of pigs. I think, however, it was the element of sociability which we missed. The people of Tamazunchale sought meat and drink for their spirits as well as their bodies at their weekly markets; the people of Taxco sought bodily sustenance only. There were no groups of Indians coming in from the country on Saturday evening and sleeping in the streets all night. Moreover, the market place occupied an exclusive square, and was not in the heart of things.

Neither did we much care to linger beside the public laundry pools, picturesque though they were, as, from the bridge at Tamazunchale, we had watched the women on the brink of the river below us, rubbing and rinsing their clothes. I don't know why exactly. Sentimental unreason, perhaps. We pre-

ferred the more ancient method in its serenely graceful un-self-consciousness.

Not at all sentimental, however, was my appalled reaction to an encounter in Taxco which was of the very essence of antiquity.

I had climbed higher than usual, in pursuit of a church so elusive that, after leading me through the inmost recesses of six vertical mazes, it still remained hidden, and I had stopped for the twentieth time to take breath, when, from around a corner, came an Indian. He was short and slender. A Yankee boy of fourteen might have his caliber. Yet on his back was a square block of stone big enough to serve as the cornerstone of a church. To my shame be it said that the mere sight did not dismay me. I had grown accustomed to it; and perhaps I had drifted into a kind of belief that the Indian body really is peculiarly fit for burden bearing. At any rate, my first reaction was entirely selfish. Here was a man who could tell me the way to my church. So, when he and I came face to face, I put my question and waited confidently for the courteous reply which experience had taught me to expect from all Indians. To my surprise, he did not answer at all, did not even look at me or halt one second in his rapid descent of the hill. Then it was that sickness seized me. In a bitter flash of realization, I understood that he was not even remotely aware of my presence, because his entire being was concentrated on a task which was almost too much for him. He dared not notice anything else, dared not delay one instant. The whole force of his spirit

(and what a force!) was driving his puny body to superhuman achievement. I hated myself in that moment; I hated the jaunty Mexican who, from a cool patio above me, answered the question I had just put to the Indian. Answered it laughingly too, as much as to say, "It was foolish in you to ask anything of a peon." But, with a leap of comfort, I remembered that Cardenas is bending his own back to the superhuman effort of redressing the wrongs of the peons, and I rejoiced in him, as I rejoice in our own burden-bearer in the White House at Washington.

At the end of two weeks we left Taxco and were not sorry to go. Our sojourn had been delightful; but, as was usual with us, enough had been enough.

{ 14 }

NOW WAS THE time to make amends for the cursory nature of our glimpse of Cuernavaca. We would return to it and stay at least overnight. Yes, I know, it's amusing; but that's the kind of travelers we are.

We had several addresses, one in particular of a handicraft shop whose proprietor welcomes a few boarders at a modest price. Unfortunately, however, the exact location of this shop had not been accurately indicated to us, and we could not find it. We certainly tried hard, driving around and around the narrow streets in the general region which had been described to us; and, since we had honestly done our best, we thought we were justified in the relief with which we finally went to the Hotel Marik. I suppose any psychiatrist would say that, preferring the Marik all the time, we had blinded ourselves to the handicraft shop. Maybe. Economy is a fixed habit with us, and we felt a certain reluctance to avail ourselves of a rate of exchange which made unaccustomed luxury possible; but there was no doubt about it that we reveled in the Marik.

The high-perched room which the clerk gave us was entirely charming. It opened on a balcony, below and beyond which lay the leafy city merging imperceptibly into green fields, and it confronted

both Popo and Ixtla at their most effective point. So delighted was I that I almost thought our survey of Cuernavaca might as well begin and end right here.

But I wanted to see Tepoztlan, the Indian village celebrated by Redfield and Stuart Chase. It lies only fifteen miles from Cuernavaca, and a new road has just been opened thither. So, after a leisurely and delicious lunch, we turned our backs on our alluring room, and once more retrieved our car from its assiduous "washers."

The short drive was different from any other we had taken in Mexico, and was vividly memorable. Straight at a low broken range of dark hills the road hurled itself. Straight also at Popocatepetl, rising grandly above the ragged barrier. The severe, somber foreground gave the white peak an ineffable serenity.

Though the barrier looked impassable, we were by this time sufficiently well acquainted with the habits of Mexican landscapes to know there would be some passage. And, sure enough, at the last level minute, our road spied a crack ajar and, darting at it, got through just in time to let it close behind us.

"Golly! that was a narrow escape," exclaimed Christopher. "I wonder how it works. Is it automatic? Or does some cosmic superman throw a switch?"

The valley bowl in which Tepoztlan lies is strikingly beautiful. Not graciously so, like the region around Cuernavaca, but romantically all the same. The bare craggy ranges about it are bold and vigorous.

The village did not seem to us to correspond with Stuart Chase's description as we remembered it. The gaunt streets, bordered by dingy square houses, were not attractive. Plenty of pigs here, however, and chickens, and burros. Very few people, but that might have been because we arrived at the siesta hour. Even the dusty plaza had a desolate look of neglect, and we were glad to turn our attention to the great church which not only dominated the village and valley but held its own with the mountain peaks. More out of proportion than usual with its secular environment was this sacred edifice.

For fifteen or twenty minutes we had the church as much to ourselves as we had had the village, and we made the most of this unciceroned privilege. The façade interested us greatly. It bore elaborate and beautiful carvings which showed three distinct religious influences: Egyptian, Aztec, and Christian. All of them vital and vigorous too, uniting in one perennial affirmation of divinity. The effect was inspiring. Thus should all ancient and modern religions merge. But how did those Sphinxlike wings get here, we wondered? Through the Aztecs? Or through some common ancestor? The unsolved mystery of aboriginal wanderings and communications had us in thrall as we stood there beneath the living handiwork of a long dead sculptor, and we felt deepened and enlarged.

Until presently a very much alive but rather sleepy young man came breathlessly out through a doorway and took possession of us. Doubtless he too had been

taking time off from his custodian's duties for a siesta. He led us first through a side door into the monastery which comprised the bulk of the edifice and accounted for its size.

Not only long dead but completely extinct are the old monks whose sandals once flapped and whispered through these corridors; no echo of them remains. But the corridors themselves were impressive, and the cloisters and patio were very lovely. Flowers bloomed in the latter, butterflies fluttered by.

One of our guidebooks had said that, on the crest of a hill near Tepoztlan, stands an ancient temple where Aztec worship is still held. What about this? we asked our custodian, when we stood on an open balcony outside the dormitories. For answer, he pointed to a steep harsh hill directly above us; then, when we could not distinguish temple from rock, he made a rough sketch of the building, and we finally traced it out. No worship, however, he told us, smiling and shrugging his shoulders as much as to say, "What's the use?" And, indeed, remembering the triumphant façade but remembering also D. H. Lawrence's book, *The Plumed Serpent*, we felt more than ever the folly of reviving old forms of religious expression. Let all serpents shed their skins. Another thing we remembered was the answer made to a question I asked of the custodian of Humboldt's House in Taxco. "Aztec worship? Sure! You can see it any day in the Taxco cathedral."

It was only half-past four when we returned to

Cuernavaca, and we debated the question of further sight-seeing. But the shadows were lengthening, and I had an imperative hunch that the sunset would be worth watching from the balcony outside our room.

Never was a surmise more fruitful or more accurately timed. As we seated ourselves on our airy perch, the last stride of the marching shadow took it across the valley to the foot of the two snow mountains. At once they sprang into salient brightness. Sharply detached from the valley, yet rooted solidly in it, they became incredible visions of glory. Defying the darkness which doomed them, they held their heads higher and higher, refining their remnant of sunlight into sheer effulgence. Then, as they realized that, once again, the diurnal conflict went against them, they flamed into a crimson statement: "Light is the truth, not darkness. Light! Light! More light!"

That is the way heroes should die.

And when the brief struggle was over and the darkness had conquered, the two ashen shapes stood luminous under the stars.

The next morning was vastly important; even more so than I realized at the time. It gave us our first sight of a Rivera mural.

Again luck was with us; for, in our haphazard manner of traveling, we had not deliberately planned to begin our Rivera study with these great walls in Cuernavaca. Yet that is precisely the place to begin. The frescoes in the Governor's Palace there are as vibrant with their creator's originality as any others,

but they are less startling than some in Mexico City. The old-fashioned canons of beauty are less subordinated to propaganda. So that the observer, accustomed to richness of color and grace of design, finds himself at home before these glowing arrangements of figures, and, little by little, arrives at the realization that the total effect they produce is quite different from anything he has felt before.

I am not wise enough to discuss the problem of the relation between propaganda and art. In the medium most familiar to me, I am inclined to think that a story or poem loses weight in exact proportion to its pedagogy. But writing is more explicit than painting, and has to be apprehended a bit at a time. The painter can put his whole meaning before his public at once, and leave it for their eyes to range over, making of it what they will.

On the walls of the upper arcade in the Governor's Palace at Cuernavaca, Diego Rivera has put nothing less than the soul of Mexico. Its tortured history is all there: from the simple happy beginnings among the free fields and villages of pre-Spanish days, through the conquest, the exploitation, the cruel oppression, down to the revolt in 1821 and the subsequent struggles toward a new independence. A perpetuation in color of the "Cry of Dolores" which Hidalgo set ringing, it moved me more than anything I had yet seen in Mexico. Studying it, I sank deeper and deeper into an understanding of this baffled race.

My own recent fragmentary experience among the peons of Tamazunchale and Taxco threw light on

these gentle, bewildered faces, these docile figures bringing extravagant tribute of fruit and game to the clutching hands of greedy priests, these toiling backs bent beneath heavy loads, these huddling groups asleep in the street. Pity burned into compassion and then into a kind of fury. To me, as to Rivera, it became wholly intolerable that such things should have happened in this beautiful country, meant for the free spontaneous life of native human beings, and I longed to be able to help redress the evil. Instead of battenning on it by taking advantage of my own country's withdrawal of money from Mexican banks and the consequent fall of the peso.

But, no, I am going too far there. I did not and do not understand the working out of the expropriation of oil wells by the Mexican Government. I only felt, as I still feel, that none of our European races has dealt well with the American continent of our forcible adoption, and that shame for our treatment of the Indians ought to make us eager to restore to them as much as possible of their native privilege. Though we have not enslaved them, we United States people have despoiled the Indians and overridden them as the Spaniards never did. They now count for less than nothing with us, whereas in Mexico they still form a big majority of the population. Our present chance is therefore a good one to make amends to the Mexican Indian for some of the wrongs we inflicted on his northern brothers. That is the indirect way retribution sometimes works out in this impartial world.

To compare a first glimpse of Rivera with the initial impact of the Grand Canyon is perhaps extravagant. But both experiences belong in the category of greatness, and both left us in no mood for further episodes. So, instead of exploring Cuernavaca, we returned to our room, packed up, took a last look at the snow mountains, and departed for Mexico City.

“'Allo Good-by!” called the children after us.

[15]

AS WE APPROACHED the city, we began to have recurrent misgivings.

Not knowing beforehand the exact time of our return, we had not written to Ramon, asking him to meet us; and memories of our last entrance were not reassuring. But Christopher had again made a careful study of a city map and had traced a red-penciled route from the end of the Cuernavaca road to Shirley Court.

"We're dumbbells if we can't follow that," said he.

And at first, for a few blocks, things went pretty well. The correct turns presented themselves in the expected order and we took them successfully. Then presently, at a point where we ought to have turned to the left, a bout of road-mending broke out and we had to make a detour. This troubled us only slightly because we soon recovered our main avenue. But when we found that, during our brief absence, this avenue had changed its name, our confidence in it was shaken. Moreover, a score of crooked side streets, which the map completely ignored, now put in their appearance; and, on getting out to inspect them, Christopher found that they all bore *transito* signs pointing straight at us. So that we felt like stray animals being herded to market by vigilant

dogs along an unknown road. Our red-penciled route had vanished entirely. The only course left us seemed to be to take our bearings by the sun and the slant of the shadows and then to cruise around the obvious bulk of the Bull Ring Bellavista, hunting for some way out. This process, however, resulted in nothing but an entanglement which bound us up ready for handing over to the first garage we saw. The confusion of metaphors suits our own mental confusion, and I will augment it by saying that we resembled two flies attempting to negotiate a spider's web composed of a few straight, simple lines and finding themselves involved in filament after filament which sprang at them out of nothing. The garage had a helpless victim when at last it appeared in our circuit. No price demanded for driving us to Shirley Court would have seemed prohibitive.

Our idea in going to Shirley Court was both practical and sentimental. We enjoy the illusion of home life created by a separate roof over our heads and a kitchen to ourselves. Also we find it convenient to have our car close at hand. But, in this particular instance, I'm not sure our choice was wise. The court was all right; in fact, admirable. It had a wide patio, with tables and chairs scattered in it; a small café; a reading room; and attractively furnished cabins, equipped with every convenience. But it was too far from the city, in an anomalous kind of suburb which might have been anywhere in the world and consequently seemed nowhere at all. I think it would have been better to have stayed at a hotel where we

could have immersed ourselves in the city, but where, tired by sight-seeing, we could have retreated to our room now and then and rested for a few minutes.

This conviction, however, is purely personal and incidental. For people who like Mexico City enough to spend a season there, a degree of aloofness from traffic must seem desirable; and domestic peace can be found nowhere better than at Shirley Court.

The truth is out in that last sentence: I did not like Mexico City. Perhaps the altitude was to blame, though in New Mexico and Arizona I have always felt exhilarated by a height of seven thousand feet. It could not have been those other bogies, the food and water; for our diet was carefully chosen. It might have been the aftermath of too much climbing in Taxco. It might have been nothing but my own Anno Domini. At any rate, in Mexico City, I could not walk more than three or four blocks without an exhaustion which sometimes became so acute that I sat down wherever I happened to be: on the steps of a church if possible; if not, on a curbstone. Another time (if any!), I shall carry a folding chair over my arm. For, strangely enough, there are no benches in the Zocalo as there are in every other Mexican plaza we saw.

Since our two attempts at driving our car in the city had not been very successful, we put it away in the big garage at Shirley Court and drove into town by taxi. This cost us one peso a trip. Twenty cents for a half-hour ride, and no tip at the end!

A routine soon established itself. We would have a good breakfast, prepared on our own gas stove and consisting of three viands in which Mexico excels: crusty rolls, fresh eggs, and marvelous oranges. Now and then, tortillas from a small near-by bakery. The coffee, however, was a United States brand, secured by much hunting through grocery stores. Then we would wash our few dishes and, leaving our key at the office, would pass out into the street and hail one of the taxis always waiting there.

Generally we headed for the Zocalo, that big historic square which has been the city's center since 1325. It was here that the wandering Aztec tribes, led by a vision and searching for a sign, saw an eagle perched on a cactus and holding a snake in its claws. The Plumed Serpent bade them stop. The gorgeous civilization which they proceeded to develop in and around this spot is too familiar to need mention by my inadequate pen. Nevertheless, it now eludes the imagination. In vain does one remind oneself that, just over there, on the site of the huge cathedral, stood the Aztec temple which Cortez saw rising one hundred feet high. In vain does one remember that, even now, in the soil under one's feet, idols and tools and ornaments lie buried. The Zocalo was a kind of forum, teeming with life. But the later usurping life has been too much for every original vestige and has swept the old order away as if it had never existed at all.

This seemed to us a pity; and, instead of entering the commanding cathedral, we made our first

acquaintance with Mexico City in the museum on Calle Moneda.

Here we stood for a long time studying the famous calendar stone which, at the date of its invention, was the most accurate measure of time in the world. That simple fact in itself is eloquent of the iniquity wrought by Cortez in his wholesale destruction.

Then we proceeded to the sacrificial altars, and were suddenly not so sure of the iniquity.

I cannot speak for Christopher, who is always better informed than I, but the number of these stones was a surprise to me. They betokened a continuous process which I had always thought of as occasional. Like the death of Iphigenia. Like the all but accomplished offering up of Isaac. Every early religion has made propitiatory sacrifice of human life, and nobody has for this reason thought less well of the Greeks and Hebrews. For that matter, the Christian religion is founded on nothing less than a Supreme Human Sacrifice. But the inordinate slaughter betokened by the number and variety of Aztec altars is appalling. As is also the method of cutting the heart from a living victim and throwing it, still warm and beating, at the feet of the god. This revolting practice, however, was harder on the spectators than on the oblation, for death was immediate. Whereas, in a crucifixion, the agony was prolonged.

Nevertheless, the Aztec altars were cheerful; and, in that characteristic, they showed a different feeling about life and death from the skull and crossbones reaction of other religions. There was nothing fero-

cious about the beasts which upheld the concave stones and opened their mouths to let the blood flow through. The carvings of cactus and vine and tree were serene and beautiful. Apparently, to the man who made this cup of libation and the priest who filled it, the function was not only universal but inevitable. Life must flow through death in order to be renewed.

However, the realization of the vast multitude of Aztec hearts flung into these basins is staggering; and, if Cortez had not specialized in so many other cruelties on his own account, one would rejoice in his arrival to check this particular offense. As it is, one can only remember that the last great god Quetzalcoatl had already begun to preach against human sacrifice; and the impotent wish increases that these indigenous Americans might have been let alone to work out their destiny.

From the museum we went to the National Palace. Over one of its entrances hangs the bell rung by Dolores Hidalgo in a little Indian village in 1810, rousing the people to begin their fight against Spain. This Liberty Bell of Mexico is rung by the President every year on September 15th at eleven o'clock in the evening, and the shouting throng in the Zocalo must be worth coming far to witness. Strange that an obscure priest should have known how to start such a successful revolution!

The Rivera frescoes which cover the walls beside and above the great central staircase of the palace tell the story which the bell announced. They are

not in themselves so beautiful as those in Cuernavaca, and they are crowded with people and incidents to a very confusing degree. Even as historic documents, which seems their ultimate purpose, they would have been more effective if they had been simpler. But the passionate spirit which poured itself out so lavishly here proves contagious, and the bewildered observer feels that this is the packed record of a very great chapter of the world's history. Struggle is of course always confusing. Perhaps simplicity could not have conveyed the desired impression. At any rate, though I did not hope or even try to remember many of the details of the pictures, I came away with a keener interest than ever in the autonomous future toward which this inchoate country is forging its way.

By this time we were tired; and, since Sanborn's was not far distant, we turned thither in company with a large number of our fellow countrymen.

Very suitable is the housing of this famous restaurant. As we have an English saying that an unpromising person "will never set the river on fire," so is there an old Spanish proverb to the effect that a similar person "will never build a house of tiles." This maxim was frequently applied to a certain youthful member of the Orizaba family. "Very well, I'll show 'em!" he said at last; and, departing for the Far East, he developed a trade there which made him very rich. On his return, he reclaimed his family homestead in Mexico City and remade it completely, covering it inside and out with tiles. One can easily imagine in what complacent splendor he

lived here, entertaining the poor relations who had derided him.

This was long ago, however, and the House of Tiles is now occupied by an American restaurant which also had humble beginnings. A soda-water fountain proved so acceptable to thirsty Mexican throats that it expanded into a light-lunch counter, then into a drugstore and candy shop, then into a real restaurant, and finally, having set its own small river on fire by achieving an unlikely success, it moved into the House of Tiles and proceeded to develop a notable establishment. Now there is no spot in the city better known. People say, "Meet me at Sanborn's," as a matter of course. Not only United States people either. The Spanish section of the menu card precedes the English; and, at adjoining tables, *enchiladas* and griddle cakes are simultaneously consumed.

At the head of the stairway of this old palace there is an Orozco mural which seems to me finer than any of the Riveras; and in the big upper rooms are many pictures and museum pieces of furniture and old china. To say nothing of fabulous rugs and baskets.

But I begin to sound like a radio advertisement, and I will desist. Only remarking first, by way of counter-criticism, that the exterior of the House of Tiles would look better for a bath.

On emerging from Sanborn's, we found ourselves so refreshed that our fatigue had vanished. "Let's go to the San Carlos Academy," said Christopher. "All right," I assented; and we started off. Immediately, however, we became aware of a curious

change in our entire environment; and, puzzled, we looked about us. Something had happened to the street since we had left it an hour before.

"Why," remarked Christopher, "the shops are all closed."

"And there are no people," I added, amazed.

"What can be the matter? A revolution? An air raid? A plague?"

It was a really alarming experience to leave a busy street, crowded from curb to curb, and curb to house front, flowing like a steady river, and, returning, to find it empty and silent.

Then the truth dawned upon us. Siesta. Of course! We had heard of the absolute nature of this Mexican custom; but, so far, we had never seen it in public practice. The effect was incredible to our northern minds. That a shop should break off its brisk commerce in the height of the day and the season, dismiss its employees, put up its blinds, and quietly go to sleep! Consulting our guidebook, we learned that the San Carlos Academy closes at one and that most of the sights of the city are matutinal affairs.

"Well!" I announced. "I'm delighted. When in Mexico, do as the Mexicans. But perhaps we can't even find a taxi awake to take us to our beds."

It must be that Mexican drivers know their way around with their eyes closed; for, after walking a block or two through the strange muted city, we came on a taxi whose driver lay slumbering with his

head on his wheel; and, hardly changing his position, he conveyed us safely to Shirley Courts.

It is not my intention to chronicle our sojourn in Mexico City diurnally. There were some dull hours which may as well be forgotten, some periods of fatigue which would stagger my pen. But the high spots stand out vividly.

For the Preparatory School and the Ministry of Education we reserved our early morning sessions of most nearly adequate vigor. The murals of Rivera and Orozco, spread on the walls of the patios here and in the many-storied arcades, are almost inexhaustible sources of interest. In them the Indian life of the last four centuries is preserved. What a heritage for a nation! One can only be sorry that it is confided to such a perishable medium, exposed to ill treatment by nature and by humanity. Vandals have already scrawled their names over some of the figures, defacing the revolutionists whom they did not happen to like; colors have faded, bits of plaster have dropped. The achievement of the two great painters must be a transient one. But to us, looking at them here and now, the frescoes were poetry and history, drama, religion, beauty, and emotion so poignant that it became sometimes almost unendurable. As in Orozco's picture of Saint Francis, swept by a whirlwind of pity to succor two beggars at the same time, his brown robe streaming behind him with the haste of his errand, his face distorted by the agony he strives to alleviate.

That is the keynote: compassion. An anguish of

fellow-feeling for the Indian peon, oppressed through so many centuries. It rings many changes of bitterness, anger, scorn, derision, revenge; and some of it is not very pretty. The gross, hypocritical priests; the arrogant ladies, treading on the faces and hands of the poor; the ruthless exploiters; the wily politicians: many of these figures seem exaggerated to the point of monstrosity. But all oppression is monstrous. Especially that of a simple-hearted race, asking nothing but to be let alone in the arcadian life they are evolving for themselves. The frescoes depicting the pristine estate of the Indians are serene and lovely enough to make Spanish and Anglo-Saxon heads bow with shame. This beautiful life we have wrecked. And what have we built in its place?

Such thoughts as these made my hours spent with Orozco and Rivera very sober ones.

Just as our sojourn among the Indians in Tamazunchale and Taxco had prepared us for an intelligent study of the historic murals, so did the murals send us away in search of Indians. We missed them in Mexico City. But they were not far to seek. The Merced market on Sunday morning gave them to us in multitudes.

This famous market is held, not in an open plaza, but in a crisscross series of narrow streets in a crowded part of the city teeming with people and dogs and burros, chickens and pigs. The effect is overwhelming. Space itself seems to vanish there, and the universe solidifies into impermeable matter which yet is in violent agitation. The booths elbow one another

so closely that their wares flow into and out of each other as in a surrealist picture, and their odors combine into one stupendous stench. Individual progress seems impossible without stepping on something or somebody; yet the tide of people moves as smoothly as if they had no feet or legs. Seeing the middle of the streets covered with small squares of merchandise laid out on the pavement, we naturally concluded that motor traffic was suspended for the morning. But we were mistaken. As we maintained a precarious foothold on the invisible edge of a sidewalk, we saw a motor car advancing toward us. Slowly, very slowly, it came, straddling with precision, now a collection of crockery, now a pile of oranges, now a basket of eggs. One merchant removed his display of handkerchiefs by lifting the four corners of the cloth on which it lay and replacing it after the car had passed; but most of the objects stayed just where they were, and nothing was injured. Sporty driving and sporty marketing!

We got lost in this market and wandered around in a maze which soon assumed a nightmare quality. On our fifth return to the same spotted pig, I had to remind myself that his cloven hoofs were an innocent gift of nature, not a symbol of mischievous evil; and, on our eighth revolution, I imagined a fork in his tail. When at last we emerged in a boothless street, we were of course completely disoriented, and no taxis were to be found. There was nothing to do but inquire our way to the Zocalo and walk thither, lugging our recent purchases of papayas and man-

goes, oranges and bananas. Of all my memories of fatigue, this is the most desolating. Each foot was a planted mountain, each step tore it up by the roots.

And the Zocalo was no refuge. Colonel Batista of the Cuban army was making a visit to Mexico, and the entire populace of the city, save that which we had left in the Merced market, filled the region around the National Palace with a vociferous throng. Passage was out of the question. We must wait. But where? Feeling an imperious impulse to lie down on the sidewalk and take a chance of being safely straddled by legs as the wares in the market had been by wheels, I cast a wild glance about me and saw a bus station with an empty bench in it. Doubtless it was intended for bus passengers, but I appropriated it. With a final drag of my legs, roots and all, I entered the open doorway and collapsed.

"Good!" said the tireless Christopher, piling his bundles beside me. "You stay here and rest while I see what's going on."

When he returned, half an hour later, he had secured a taxi; and, while we drove back to Shirley Court, he told me that he had engaged a young man to take us to the Floating Gardens in the afternoon. Or rather, the youth had offered his services, explaining that he was not an official guide and was therefore not open to hire, but he liked to spend his Sundays showing tourists around.

"He's a nice lad. I liked him," said Christopher. "He spent several years in Chicago and speaks English

easily. I told him to engage a good taxi with a capable driver, and to come for us at two o'clock."

Because of my weariness, I did not anticipate this expedition with unqualified pleasure, but now I would not have missed it. Which is not saying that the Floating Gardens struck us as very beautiful. The water was horribly dirty, even more so than in a Venetian canal; and, wherever else dirt may be forgiven, in water it is a sin against nature. Moreover, the barge-like boats were awkward and heavy. They collided with each other and deployed clumsily. It would perhaps have been better to have come on a weekday when there were fewer visitors. The grace of the willows lining the banks would then have been more apparent. But one does not go to Coney Island out of season unless one wishes to avoid the very thing the place stands for; and to see what the Floating Gardens mean to the Mexican people, one must go there on Sunday.

Some of the barges were hung with bells which rang fitfully. All of them had guitar or mandolin players aboard. In the smaller boats, lovers dreamed. In the larger, whole families sat around tables, eating picnic lunches or playing cards. Floating kitchens plied an industrious trade. Floating fruit and vegetable markets were briskly attentive. Entire chapters of Mexican life had translated themselves into a watery language, and the novelty lent a new zest to familiar activities. Friends called to each other from boat to boat; music and laughter echoed against the banks.

All this was enjoyable, but the keenest interest lay in the realization that, as this particular region looked now, so had the whole of Mexico City looked when Cortez discovered it. Why the Aztecs should have settled in such a liquid place is one of the historical mysteries of faith and courage; and the subsequent skill of the Spaniards in draining and reclaiming the land does something to excuse their usurpation. But geography is stubborn. What if the marsh underlying the city were to reassert itself? We were told (how accurately I do not know) that the heavy buildings are settling fast. Four hundred years comprise a brief span of history. In another four hundred, or six, or eight, the apparently docile element of water may once more be supreme.

Returning from the Floating Gardens, we drove through the suburb of San Angel where Rivera has his home. A curious home, we thought it; very modernistic, in angular blocks of pink and blue, with a huge chromium staircase winding up against one of the outer walls. Its owner designed it in an uninspired mood. Trotsky's present house of exile is also uncompromisingly ugly, a blunt square of blue plaster, glaring in the sun. Our young guide assured us that the interior is very beautiful, and we took his word for it; but there was no visible foliage indicating a hidden patio, and the stark suburban street could not have provided a tempting view from the windows. We craned our necks with frank curiosity, but caught no glimpse of anyone looking out. Only a sentry across the way from the house emerged from his

station and eyed us suspiciously. We wondered what the great Russian was doing behind those blank azure walls. Probably writing his autobiography. Or perhaps biding his time.

Our re-entrance into the city lay through Chapultepec Park, loveliest city park in the world, yes, even lovelier than the Bois de Boulogne. Its famous *ahuehuete* trees are more impressive and beautiful than their equally famous contemporaries, the redwoods of California; and the long vistas and sweeping spaces are exhilarating. The castle on the hill in the center of the park interested us less because it was built by Montezuma and occupied by successive rulers of Mexico than because it is not occupied by the present ruler. To President Cardenas there seemed a gross inconsistency between his democratic principles and this stately mansion; so he refused to live in it, and turned it over to the general public for a museum. As such, we did not visit it; but the forbearing absence of its rightful occupant lent it a special grace.

Facing it, on the crest of the hill, is an eloquent monument: a young and beautiful Indian woman, wrapped in her *reboso*, mourning; while, against the four sides of the marble shaft, four Indian warriors stand defeated but erect. There is a passion of grief and proud acquiescence about the five silent figures which stirred me more bitterly than I at all enjoyed.

By way of relief and contrast, we were entirely charmed with the Don Quixote fountain in one of the recesses of the park. This is so small and its nook

is so obscure that it takes much hunting, but is well worth the trouble. Around a circular pool of gold-fish-haunted water, a tiled pavilion is built, every tile depicting an episode in the romantic history of Cervantes' hero. A circular bench invites the visitor to sit down and read. On one side of the pavilion stands a bronze figure of Don Quixote, lightly poised on his tiptoes, a little off balance, both hands in the air, one of them holding the book of knightly adventures from which he is reading aloud while he gesticulates. On the opposite side stands Sancho Panza, solidly planted, his feet well apart, and listens with an expression of perplexity, amusement and loyal devotion which is admirable. Never has the spirit of one work of art been more deftly expressed by another. The thing is a masterpiece.

That Sunday afternoon was a success, and we insisted on paying our self-appointed guide. But, unless he possessed superb histrionic ability, he was genuinely sorry to have us do so; and, through the whole experience, he had had an air of enjoying himself as much as we did. A thoroughly nice lad.

[16]

NEVERTHELESS, IT WAS to Ramon that we turned when we wanted to enlarge the field of our explorations and therefore needed our car. A line written to him at his hotel brought him to us early the next morning.

Incredibly early. Daylight comes faster in Mexico than in the United States; and, instead of accepting this natural advantage, Mexico City had turned it into what seemed to us a distinct disadvantage by going on daylight saving time the first of February. The purpose was, we were told, to save electricity, but all the lights were on when we had breakfast at eight o'clock. Moreover, the moon was shining. It gave us an eerie feeling to start the day's activities in the apparent middle of the night.

There was one benefit, however: the crisp air had a heady effect. Both Ramon and Christopher burst into song as we drove out into the sunrise, and the newly minted day filled our hands with overflowing wealth.

How should we spend it? Ramon's advice corresponded exactly with our desire. Our objective should be the Teotihuacan pyramids; and, on the way

to them, we would visit as many other places as Ramon saw fit.

The first of these was the Guadalupe Shrine.

Now there is no doubt about it that even the most pious person does grow a little tired of seeing churches in Mexico. There are so many of them, and they are of necessity so much alike. Though we had entered three or four churches in Mexico City, we had not lingered in any of them. The huge cathedral at one end of the Zocalo had frankly bored us with its heavy bulk.

This ecclesiastical respite may have had something to do with the impression Guadalupe made on us; but I hope our senses could never have become so jaded that we failed to respond to this loveliest church of its kind in the world.

Perfect it is, really perfect, as few mundane things ever manage to be: a beautiful flower unfolding from the root of a beautiful legend; a strain of pure music, evoking from millions of hearts an answering cadence. That it should have been built at all on this sorry globe and that, even now, cynical and disillusioned, we have only to see it to come under its gracious spell, is a bigger reason for hope than all our wars give us for despair. After all, the humble things of the spirit are those which survive and persist.

He was utterly humble, the Indian boy who, on December 9, 1531, saw the Virgin Mary on Tepeyas Hill and was told by her to go and ask Bishop Zumarraga to build her a shrine here from which she might watch over the Indians. The boy obeyed, but the

bishop did not. He was far too busy with important matters to heed the vagaries of an ignorant savage. The Virgin might have been busy too, but she found time to appear again to Juan Diego and repeat the message. This time the bishop was indignant. Juan Diego must stop pestering him with stories which he could not prove. Very well, assented the Virgin, she would supply the proof. She led the astonished boy to a barren place where there never had been any vegetation, and filled his *sarape* with roses which she bade him take to the bishop. Then, as proof beyond any cavil, she imprinted a picture of her own face on the *sarape*.

It was as a shrine for the *sarape* that the church of Guadalupe was forthwith begun.

I suppose it was soon sufficiently finished to afford the Virgin the pied-à-terre she wanted; and perhaps she would have been quite content with its first simplicity. But by this time the magic of the story had opened hearts and purses to a degree requiring more and yet more and more expression. So that the church was not solemnly dedicated until 1709, and had then cost over three million dollars. Which sum has been augmented during the last century.

It must be true that original motive shapes ultimate achievement. The extravagant adornment of the Taxco cathedral sprang from a man's selfish desire to recover his fortune, and is therefore vulgar and heavy. The even more lavish outpouring of money for Guadalupe was transmuted by its pure purpose into a tribute no part of which could be anything but

exquisite. A delicate grill of wrought-iron encircles the church; and, over the main gateway is a nativity group of figures forming the loveliest crèche I think I have ever seen. Around and above the main doorway are beautiful carvings of stone, while, within the entrance, the visitor is received into a realm of softly shimmering grace. The clustering gray stone pillars stand on pediments of green malachite, and the shafts of those around the high altar are covered with gold leaf. From the same green basis spring the arches of the gray vaulted roof. Green are the tall candlesticks, gold the hanging candelabra. Green and gold, green into gold. It is as if the earth had sent forth a heavenly aspiration which was promptly fulfilled. The effect is both cool and glowing. The whole church shines with a soft luster very restful to the eyes. But the stained glass windows and the mosaics in the dome bring all the other colors of earth and heaven to enrich the scene. There seemed nothing surprising in the sight of pilgrims moving up the center aisle on their knees.

Mass was in progress while we were here, so we moved quietly about the fringes of the congregation, making only occasional whispered comments. Already we knew that this was a place which we should have to revisit. But Ramon called our attention to the solid silver altar in one of the chapels and to the silver altar rail before it. Also to the silver arabesques on the wall of the sacristy. These scrolls and whorls, when examined, were found to be composed of tiny silver legs and arms, hearts and eyes and hands and

feet: offerings made by people cured of maladies in those organs. The sight explained to us the trays of silver anatomy which had puzzled us in many shops and markets. Mindful of Christopher's recent recovery from an attack of sciatica, I suggested that he contribute a silver leg to the sacristy, and I myself sometime perhaps an ear.

It was with a sense of spiritual well-being that we came away from this lovely church, so warm, yet so restrained, so humanly divine; and Ramon regarded us with a gratified eye. The perquisites of his avocation were not all monetary; he loved sharing with other people the beauties of his native land.

The Acolman Convent to which he next drove us was very different from the Guadalupe Shrine. Begun at about the same time (1539) and completed in 1560, it has not been used and cared for as the other church has been, and therefore it seems much older. We found it easy to believe that Cortez built a canal from this spot and launched his successful attack on the Aztec city. We waded back into history as we followed the custodian about the crumbling rooms and corridors.

But we plunged in and swam off in good earnest when we arrived at the pyramids. In fact, just personally, I sank and was drowned, for faintness submerged me as well as antiquity.

It had been Ramon's intention to lunch in the restaurant at the entrance to the pyramids, and we approached it cheerfully, quite ready to sit down for a while and receive refreshment. The early morning

resilience had flagged. Savory odors welcomed us, a long array of tables stood spread, waiters darted to and fro. But, alas! not for us. After a few rapid words with a preoccupied head waiter, Ramon informed us regretfully that the Cuban colonel, Batista, was coming to see the pyramids today and that all the resources of the restaurant had been commandeered for him. We might stay and look on if we chose. We might even drink beer at one of a small group of tables above the grotto dining-room. But there was no food to spare.

It seemed to us strange that a restaurant should thus frankly go into bankruptcy with its regular customers. What similar establishment in the United States would not have had canned provisions in store, would not have resorted to every device short of cannibalism rather than turn anybody away? Perhaps Ramon read our criticism in our faces. At any rate, he disappeared and returned by-and-by, flushed but victorious, with three bottles of beer and six rolls. This provender we consumed slowly while we watched the official population of Mexico City file down the steps into the dining-room and listened to the weird strains of an Indian band heralding the arrival of the sturdy Cuban colonel, resplendent in medals and gold braid. We hoped he enjoyed his luncheon. There was certainly plenty of it, course after course, and it smelled very good.

Now I am no natural toper. Unless ballasted by something more substantial than two small rolls, even so mild a tippie as beer sets me swimming on an

unsteady keel. Therefore, when we went forth under the blazing midday sun to explore the pyramids, I was in a state to see and believe the impossible. I can't say that I enjoyed it. A full possession of all one's faculties seems to me essential to a right use of any experience. But I think perhaps the loose-jointedness of my entire being gave the unknown past a chance to permeate me. For, since it is really unknown, it cannot make an explicit impression.

Scientific investigations proceed with such precision nowadays that one expects them always to arrive at more, rather than less, knowledge. When, therefore, the contrary result is declared, one feels at first as if the bottom had dropped out of the universe. But slowly it dawns upon one that that is a good way to feel, for a universe without a bottom is much more conformable with imagination and reason than the snug tight little affair we used to inhabit. And faith is more securely buttressed by humble but adventurous ignorance than by cocksure dogmatism. Not many decades ago, historians and archaeologists stated that the American continent had known human life only a few centuries. Now they say that man has been here for thousands of years, how many they have not yet determined. Every fresh discovery pushes the American Adam and Eve farther back into prehistoric mystery. No less careful an authority than Edgar Hewett surmises that the Teotihuacan pyramids date from before Christ.

Who built them nobody knows at all. Toltec is the hypothetical name applied to the aboriginal cul-

ture preceding the Aztec. It was probably akin to the Mayan further south. And to the Egyptian? That question recurs irresistibly, as one reflects that the rage for pyramid-building broke out at apparently about the same time in the widely separated lands. Did they have means of communication unknown to us? Were the lost continents of Mu and Atlantis not mythical fancies but solid negotiable fact? Or were pyramids natural symptoms of a certain stage of human development?

One fundamental difference obtained between Egypt and Mexico. The Egyptian pyramids were built as tombs for the Pharaohs; those in Mexico became huge altars for sacrifice to the gods. The latter were solid structures, composed of adobe and rubble over which layers of stone were laid. But the laborious process of building was identical. These huge blocks were carried on the backs of slaves, and the agony which went into the construction piled up also a debt which has not yet been paid by mankind.

I felt it heavy upon my own shoulders as, out in the fierce sunlight, faint from hunger and dizzy from beer, I remembered the Indian peon staggering under his load in Taxco, and looked at these huge structures, layer upon layer and tier above tier. "Man's inhumanity to man" is a phrase which never seems to permit revision. Thanks to machinery, we no longer exploit sinews and muscles, but we let people starve in multitudes. My own condition was far from starvation and transient at that, but it served to bring home to me the peculiar offense of my day and

generation: unemployment, share-cropping, minimum waging, high pricing. Oh, who shall deliver us from the body of this death?

Thus the inadequate luncheon worked, keeping my thoughts at home. For the beer was reserved the privilege of blurring my wits until I lost them completely in the unknown but keenly apprehended past. I saw the platforms flanking the great quadrangle filled with visiting tribes. I saw the barbaric procession of priests and victims mount the broad flight of steps leading up to the Temple of Quetzalcoatl. I saw two priests bend the naked body of a youth backward until his chest was taut. And then, if I had not looked away quickly, I should have seen another priest plunge a short knife into the left breast and with his hand pull out the beating heart and throw it into the votive bowl. I covered my face. But it was over swiftly, and now it is all so long, long ago, nobody knows how long, that the pain and sorrow are healed and the sin is forgiven. Only the symbol remains to remind us that we too are not guiltless in our dealings with human hearts.

There are evidences that a large settlement of people once surrounded the Teotihuacan pyramids. They lived in flimsy houses of straw or adobe which have long since disappeared. But the Temple of Quetzalcoatl contains inner apartments for the use of the priests. There is even a kind of aqueduct here, issuing in what is supposed by some authorities to have been a primitive shower bath. God knows, the priests needed one! For the rest, the rooms are just

empty places which the imagination may fill how and if it will.

Take it all in all, our hours spent at Teotihuacan were not exhilarating, and we were glad when Ramon called a halt. He himself must have been more than ready to stop; for, because of daylight saving, he had overslept that morning and had come off without his breakfast. Nor had his mettlesome Indian heritage allowed him to accept our offer to stop and give him a meal along the way.

Back in the city at half-past four, we went all together to a hotel recommended by Ramon, and ate a five-course dinner. That the meal should have been ready thus in the middle of the afternoon made amends for the lack of preparedness on the part of the pyramid restaurant. Few hotels in New York or Chicago would even have had open dining-rooms. Then we returned to Shirley Court, and, leaving Ramon and Christopher to their own devices, I went to bed.

{17}

THE NEXT MORNING there were stars as well as the moon in the sky when we started out, and the sun did not rise until we were under way. For our destination was Puebla, about eighty miles from Mexico City. And, since the siesta deadlock obtains here too, all our sight-seeing would have to be done in the morning.

Ramon was in high spirits. He had slept and breakfasted well; and, as he twirled the wheel of our car deftly through the early traffic, he sang Yankee Doodle.

"Ramon," we said, "you'd better come back to the States with us."

"And what should I do there?" he countered.

"Oh, drive a car for somebody; teach a class in Spanish; get a job as assistant to an archaeologist."

"No." He shook his head and his young face sobered. "You see, I'm ambitious."

"Well, but of course!"

We were puzzled. All the pursuits we had mentioned seemed better than guiding tourists.

"I want to study hard and perfect myself," Ramon continued.

"Is there then a school for guides?" I inquired, more than ever at a loss.

He flashed me a smile in which pride contended with mischief.

"It's a law school I mean, signora," he said. "I've finished my first year already, and now I'm earning money to continue."

Whereupon, he laughed gaily, in order to give the disclosure a humorous slant which might spare us embarrassment.

But we were too keenly interested to mind personal discomforture. As eagerly as he would let us (he had a controlled and controlling way with him), we plied him with questions and learned that a legal practice in the political field was the goal he had set himself. Profoundly patriotic, as all too few of us are with our shallower roots in the northern parts of the American continent, he wanted to help shape the destiny of Mexico. Again, as so often during the last two months, I was aware of the stubborn persistence of a racial integrity which antedates anything I had known and which filled me with admiration and envy. A country guided by a farseeing President and served by loyal and zealous citizens will surely work out a sturdy salvation. And, also again as so often, I wondered whether Roosevelt and Cardenas are friends.

Meantime, our eyes were busy. The country around us was taking on beauty and grandeur with every mile. After a short stretch of flatness, the road headed for a range of mountains beside which soared Ixtlaccihuatl, and presently began soaring itself, swinging up around taut curves which made those

of the Pan American Highway seem almost relaxed. Because of the exigencies of the wheel and because of the glorious landscape, our tongues moved more and more spasmodically and finally ceased altogether, save for occasional involuntary Ohs and Ahs.

A noble pine forest surrounded us. The sun filtered through the soft green swaying branches and spilled flecks of ruddy gold on the brown needles underneath. Now and then, at the end of a vista, the crest of the Sleeping Lady swam into view. Once in a while, the white scut of a deer or a brook flashed by. We loved the place and were glad to learn that it is as inviolate as it appears, for the Mexican Government has made it a national forest.

Descending from the mountains and winding around Ixtlaccihautl, the road soon disclosed Popocatepetl also, and gave us one of the best views to be had in Mexico of the two snow peaks. They were so near that they seemed within walking distance. Yet an essential aloofness removed them from any thought of approach. More than any other mountains of our acquaintance, these legendary summits preserved their detachment from the human scene.

Human enough, however, the immediate foreground became, with groups of grass huts, with small villages and larger towns, and with churches, churches. What a pious part of Mexico this must have been in the old days! They were colorful, picturesque churches too, and often I wanted to stop and have a closer look. Especially should I have been glad to have turned aside from the main road

and visited Tlaxcala where, according to our guide-book, there is "the incomparably beautiful Sanctuary of Ocotlan." But Ramon, though of course ready to leave the decision to us, reminded us that in Puebla there are five hundred churches and that the morning was slipping away. So, "Another time," we promised each other, and held on our way.

Vivid glimpses remain in my memory. One is of a tall church on a hill near Cholula. A long flight of tree-bordered steps led up to its façade, and it held itself very regally. As well it might, since within it was celebrated the first mass for the only Christian king Mexico ever knew, Maximilian of Austria.

Another memory is of Cholula itself, a snug little city composed exclusively of churches. At least, that is the impression they give, bubbling up like domes of yeast in a bread bowl, three hundred and sixty-five of them, one for every day in the year. The church in the center surmounts an old pyramid which made Cholula a kind of Mecca for pilgrimages long before the birth of Columbus, perhaps even before that of Jesus. Legend says that the god Quetzalcoatl, on his way from his earthly sojourn in Mexico back to a period of rest and renewal in the sun, stopped at Cholula long enough to teach its inhabitants agriculture, manufacture and art. One cannot help sharing the hope of the Indians that this good god will come again. Or, if indeed it should prove to be true that he did come in the unlikely guise of Cortez, as was firmly believed in 1519, there remains a challenging opportunity for redress and atonement on the part of

the present generation in whose blood victor and victim mingle.

Arriving in Puebla, we went at once to the Secret Convent. Went with our fingers slightly crossed and our tongues inclining toward our cheeks, because the story of this famous nunnery seemed to us entirely too good to be true. And, for all we yet know, it may not be strictly accurate. But, so immediate was our reaction of interest and credulity that our fingers unflexed and our tongues sprang back into a normal position for asking questions. The place had us completely bewitched.

The story goes that, when convents and monasteries became officially suppressed in 1857, the Mother Superior of the Convent of Santa Monica decided to make outward conformity but in reality to lie low. How she managed this can be surmised only by faith in miraculous protection. For the old convent (founded in 1696) is in the heart of the city and now forms part of a large apartment building. It is quite inconceivable that citizens, coming and going all day, should not have been aware of the presence of nuns under the same roof with them. Mexicans are, however, religious by nature, and their imaginations are quick to embrace anything smacking of intrigue and romance. It may be that the very publicity of the convent's location gave it a kind of smoke screen of secular activity. Many a man going out to his day's work, many a woman on her way to market, may have smiled at the thought of the secret devotional life maintained behind certain closed doors.

At any rate, the story continues that the convent flourished successfully until 1935. Then one day, whether by betrayal or through mere curiosity, a strolling detective lifted a flowerpot standing beside a door in the apartment building and found a bell beneath it. This of course he proceeded to ring, with the result that a nun presently opened the door. For the sake of dramatic effect, I hope that the detective was as surprised as the nun. The moment must have been staggering. And, come to think of it, I wonder why Hollywood has not long since made use of the whole episode.

"What a pity!" I sighed, as Ramon concluded this story.

He looked at me critically.

"But surely, signora," he said, "you do not think it was right that forty or fifty women should have been shut up here, doing nothing."

"It depends on what you mean by nothing," I answered.

But I did not pursue the subject. How could I explain to the practical young generation the belief which we oldsters cherish in the potency of spiritual influences? How could I find the right word to suggest to Ramon that the whole city of Puebla may have been the better for this hidden dynamo of prayer and aspiration? My thoughts could only scatter over the country, trying to follow the unfrocked nuns in their individual adaptation to the new order and wondering whether some of them were the elderly women I had seen now and then in churches,

conducting classes of children and girls. The world will swing back to a realization of its need for them by-and-by. Meantime, the whole ecclesiastical life of Mexico lies low.

But, because of its long preservation, the Convent of Santa Monica has an historic value which the secular order fully appreciates, and it is now a museum of great interest. Ramon conducted us through it with enthusiasm. We saw the rows of cells, each with its hard narrow bed, wooden pillow, and single cotton blanket; each with its crucifix. We saw the long refectory table, dominated by another crucifix and a reading desk. We saw the library, filled with huge illuminated volumes. We saw priestly garments embroidered so sumptuously that they seemed made of solid gold thread, interwoven with all shades of every other color, in exquisite designs. Needlework was an art in those days, and nuns were its experts. We saw the lovely convent garden, with a stone well in the middle and flowers growing everywhere. It was good to know that some breath of outdoors entered those secluded lives.

But where was the chapel? One would have supposed that, in a house of religion, a room for common worship would be conspicuous. Not so in this convent, however. There was something so sacred, so ultimate about the act of worship that it must never be profaned, it must even be earned in advance by an act of humility. Therefore, the Santa Monica chapel was walled off from the rest of the house, and its only door compelled the nuns to enter on their

knees. In fact, they must have been small and supple to get in even thus. Ramon told us with much relish that some of his clients were too fat to think of negotiating the aperture, and that one plump lady had stuck fast. I am afraid that this squirrel hole of a doorway is now the occasion for hilarity rather than reverence. But when I went through it, I thought of the nuns and abased myself seriously. After all, the humiliation of being laughed at is doubtless good for the soul.

The chapel itself had nothing to differentiate it from dozens of others. The same elaborate altar, the same tortured images, the same stations of the cross. But from its rear end, a steep narrow staircase led down into the utter darkness of a kind of dungeon where, one by one, the nuns performed their private penance and adoration and poured out their secret prayers. I cannot now remember whether it was by a faint gleam from a crack in the walls, or by Ramon's flashlight, that we saw the huge crucifix towering over the solitary prie-dieu, but its impression was tremendous. As is the moving memory of a kneeling nun with her face upturned and her hands outspread. But the latter, of course, is a figment of my imagination, recreating a past event. How shallow we are nowadays, I thought, turning away, how puerile with our belief in the sole importance of bodily passion, so volatile, so superficial, over the deep fire of the spirit which burns in the dark and lasts forever! The passion which so often thrilled through this dungeon is

still vibrating, and perhaps many a worldly calamity has been averted by it.

One more sight, and we had made the rounds of the convent. High up a flight of stairs, Ramon led us to a screened balcony.

"Look through this hole," he invited.

Applying our eyes to some perforations in the screen and adjusting our vision, we found that we were looking down into a large church. People were coming and going, kneeling before the high altar or the lateral shrines; a tourist with a guidebook was drifting about. Immersed as we had been for nearly an hour in the cloistered life of the convent, we were startled to see our twentieth-century contemporaries going about their everyday affairs. Nowhere else in the convent had I realized so sharply the detachment of the devotional calling as in this high balcony which gave the nuns their only glimpses of the promiscuous world; and a strong bliss flooded me as I considered the sweetness of loving mankind from this distance and pouring oneself out in a tide of intercession for him. Better, perhaps, the descent with him into the hell he has made for himself, but this heavenly perch has its place in the scheme of ministration which so vitally concerns us all.

Back in the streets of Puebla again, Ramon suggested that we rest for a few minutes in the cool and spacious plaza where plenty of benches stood under the laurel trees. This was a concession on his part, for there was much he wanted to show us and the inexorable siesta was approaching rapidly. His professional

pride was at warfare with his personal consideration for our fatigue and repletion. He kept his watch in his hand.

"We couldn't have lunch first?" I ventured, when I saw him getting ready to move.

"We could," he conceded; "but when we came out, everything would be closed."

So I assembled some shreds of courage and dragged myself from the bench in order to visit the cathedral and the church of San Dominico. With the result that I now remember not one thing about the cathedral, except that it was enormous; and about the smaller church I retain only a confused impression of gold arabesques and figures, inlaid altars and pulpit, mosaics, and every kind of ecclesiastical splendor. Yes, one detail I do remember. It was a figure called *Gratia Divina*, high in the dome above the altar: a figure so blithe and tender, so truly gracious, that the very essence of religion seemed expressed by it.

We had lunch in an old hotel which had once belonged to Maximilian and Carlotta; an excellent lunch, served with a Chianti which stimulated our imaginations as the beer had stimulated them the day before. So that we presently found ourselves once more turning backward with time in its flight, backward to yet another of the romantic chapters in the history of Mexico. The shadowy figures of the unfortunate emperor and his pitiful empress had haunted us briefly here and there: in Cuernavaca, where Carlotta's piano still stands, in Chapultepec Park, in the cathedral of Mexico City. But, being

always about some other definite errand, we had only glimpsed them out of the tail of an eye. Now, sitting at meat with them, as it were, we considered them squarely and found them infinitely tragic. Hopelessly duped from the outset of their lamentable career, pawns of the evil game which Europe has played so long that its virus is in her blood, they behaved very gallantly. It was not their fault that the beneficent schemes they devised for their subjects came to nothing, not their fault that the whole empire was a mockery. "Phantom Crown" is the title of Bertita Harding's book about them, and it says everything.

After lunch we went upstairs and wandered about the old house, so reserved and formal with its heavy Victorian furniture, so dark and airless with its few windows; and, just as, in the convent, I had been touched by the happy peace of an old episode in human life, so here I was oppressed by a residue of trouble and perplexity. Standing before the mirror in Maximilian's bedroom, I ignored the reflection of my own face (sufficiently grave too, however) and tried to look into the baffled, bewildered eyes of the puppet emperor. Death must have seemed merciful to him. Poor Carlotta suffered the worst misery of that wicked political fiasco.

It was a relief to get out into the quiet streets of Puebla, and still more of a comfort to find that the famous tile factory, which we had expected to visit, was now securely locked in the morphic arms of siesta. So that there was nothing for us to do but drive away.

Nevertheless, as we started, I took a good look about me and decided that this was one of the places to which I wanted to return. Much cleaner and more orderly than any other Mexican town we had seen, Puebla invited a sojourn long enough to become acquainted with some of her churches and with the beautiful country around her. "Another time!"

Relief, comfort, reassurance, delight: these were the gifts of the mountains as we shook off the troubled past of the city and climbed back into the high pine forest. After all, what was the past of Carlotta, or Cortez, or even Columbus, compared with that of Popo and Ixtla? What was the past of the whole human race? Perhaps a mere episode, "a rash cosmic experiment," as someone has cleverly said. The earth itself is the only creature we know with a real right to a past, and her invincible serenity instructs us that, in spite of avalanche and hurricane, earthquake and disaster, she has found it good. Moreover, she has spawned us; and, through her, if not in our own right, we have secure access to her sources of serenity. Nobody sang or whistled as we swung up and over the ranges, but we all three felt a deeper relation between ourselves and our exalted environment.

[18]

WE HAD NOW been in Mexico six weeks and a half and in Mexico City six days. No time at all really. And yet how long it seemed!

This was of course partly because we had been seeing and doing so much. Events always break up the time stream and slow it down. But I think the effect was also due to the immense step we had taken backward in history. Past Juarez, past Hidalgo, past Cortez and Montezuma, past Columbus, to the age of Quetzalcoatl. No wonder our feet moved heavily in all this sand of time.

And suddenly we realized that we must break away.

I suspect that precisely this experience is more common with tourists than they will confess. For some reason or other, the cult of admiration for Mexico is so extravagant that it permits no word of disparagement.

I remember one evening in Taxco when a number of us were talking in the patio after dinner, and a young woman asked me whether I liked Mexico.

"No," I answered immediately, without stopping to think. "But," I added even more promptly, "I have never been in a country which interested me so keenly."

"Why did you come?" she continued.

"I didn't want to," I replied. Then, with the same rebound into paradox, "But wild horses couldn't have kept me away."

Everybody laughed at me, and the young woman remarked that, for her part, she adored Mexico and could never get too much of it. Yet I learned later that, having left Taxco for a stay of some weeks in Mexico City, she did not stop driving until she reached Laredo.

There it is!

Now, back in New England, when we meet people who have been in Mexico, we drop everything and everybody to talk with them. "Where did you go?" we begin; and, by-and-by, "How long did you stay?" At the latter question, the same, yes always the very same, look comes into their eyes: apologetic, regretful, perplexed. "Not very long," they answer; "not nearly so long as we wanted to. I don't know why we didn't. I wish we had."

There it is again.

But the reason eludes me. It may be partly a matter of health. Very few of the tourists we met felt well in Mexico. Most of them had no explicit symptoms, only a general sense of malaise. "If I could put my finger on my discomfort," one woman complained, "I'd be less uneasy. It's so insidious."

Altitude maybe. Yet, as I have said, similar elevations in Arizona affect me happily.

Frankly, I give up. I do not know why one doesn't feel well in Mexico; and, if I were pressed for a reason,

I should have to fall back on the occult, as D. H. Lawrence did. There may be something in the spirit of the troubled country which forbids well-being.

One definite symptom we had which was not Mexico's fault: the ringing ear which had belled us out of Vermont and hounded us from Florida to San Antonio. Having made up our minds to endure it for the sake of our novel experience, we had ignored it as well as we could; but it had never been silenced. And, on the morning after our trip to Puebla, it took advantage of a moment of hesitation on our part to become very strident. "What about me?" it clamored. "Oh, at long last, what about me?"

"I suppose," said Christopher thoughtfully, as we ate our late breakfast, "we might go back to San Antonio. Maybe the weather is good there now. Anyway, there's a good doctor."

"But," I protested, "we haven't seen Morelia and Guadalajara, or Toluca, or Orizaba and Oaxaca."

"Do you want to?" Christopher questioned.

"Yes, very much," I answered; "really very much indeed."

"Enough to start for one of them tomorrow?"

"No," I admitted.

There it was yet again.

The truth of the matter seemed to be that, having already had rather too much of a very good thing, we were like greedy children, replete but unwilling to stop. The only sensible program was to depart.

First, however, we wanted to revisit Guadalupe, and Christopher wanted to show me some Rivera

murals which he had discovered in a part of the Secretaría unobserved by us on our previous inspection. So, giving notice of our decision to check out the next day, we once more took a taxi and drove to the Zocalo.

They were beautiful murals and I was glad to carry their memory away with me as my last impression of Rivera. He may not be at what he considers his best in his pictures of early Indian life, but he is certainly at his most serene and confident. No sudden confusion disrupts these tranquil groups of aboriginal natives, busy with the simple demands of their daily life. The only violence which befalls them is that which they understand and accept as part of the ritual of existence. The very country around them wears a less haggard look than in the later murals. This is imagination of course, the old universal retrospective dream of a Golden Age. But, if it could only be managed, perhaps in some such returning and rest, we might all of us be saved.

After a last luncheon at Sanborn's we bought a last collection of postcards on the Avenida Madero, then took a taxi to Guadalupe.

Here we found a fiesta of some sort in progress. Or possibly it was only the weekly market day for this suburb of the city. At any rate, a market was in full swing in the plaza before the church, and the church itself was fragrant and shining with tall lilies and candles. This radiant place also knew no confusion, betrayed no lack of confidence. "*Saecula saeculorum*," a priest sang at one of the altars. "*Deo*

gratias," murmured an Indian woman, crossing herself. Perhaps, after all, I reflected, we need not go far back to find the Golden Age; perhaps it already enfolds us here in this golden church. Certainly it is in religion that the only enduring freedom is to be found.

There were no taxis in evidence when we emerged from the church, but a fleet of busses was plying back and forth between the suburb and the city, and one arrived and discharged its passengers just as we reached the terminus.

"Why not go back in it?" I suggested. "If we get in at once, we can find good seats."

"All right," assented Christopher. "But we'll have to hurry."

He was far more correct in his statement than I was; for, though he and I formed the crest of the wave of humanity which hurled itself at the bus, we were no more than two specks of foam borne forward by the huge impulse and presently submerged by it. We did not "find" any seats at all; we simply accepted the seats into which we were dropped. That they happened to be at the front of the bus, beside the driver, was both lucky and unlucky for us. We were out of the thick of the crowd, but we were also over the engine and the front wheels.

If anything in the world could be worse than a New York subway jam, that Mexican bus contained it. With the significant difference that it was entirely affable. Long after there was no standing room left, people kept dropping off the platform to allow new

passengers to bring pressure to bear. And the newer the passenger, the more bundles he or she carried. Baskets of fruit and vegetables, chickens in crates, pigs in pokes, and babies, babies, babies. One cheerful young woman looked as if she were on her way to deposit two children with a relative while she herself proceeded to a maternity ward. I watched her with solicitude, and Christopher offered her his seat. But she preferred to stand. A peddler with a great bag of gewgaws opened it on the heads of the people nearest him and invited inspection. Everybody was talking and laughing. Everybody seemed fully at ease.

Especially the driver, and that was disconcerting. For to convey such a freight of humanity safely through the traffic of Mexico City would seem a task requiring the utmost concentration. This bus driver was a handsome lad in his early twenties, with a bright eye for the ladies and for all his many friends who lived along his route. Apparently he had not yet lunched; for, when the bus at last got started, he reached down for a paper bag beside him and, extracting an enormous sandwich, began to eat it zestfully. Wheel and sandwich in one hand, gear-shift in the other, eyes everywhere at once, words and laughter ready, he negotiated the circuitous route and bargained with the peddler for a fountain pen.

The anatomy of that bus was a mystery to me. That the engine was directly before us I never could have had a cool minute of doubt. The heat and noise and smell were terrific. But the gear-shift handle

resembled nothing so much as a long fishing rod which reached back over the driver's shoulder into the center of the bus. It was in constant activity, for the wheels had to be coaxed to make every least suspicion of a grade. And the bus was always stopping, either for traffic lights or to allow more passengers to try their luck at getting in. When anything like a real hill came along, the driver took a run at it, then clamped his sandwich between his teeth while, with both hands and both feet and his whole urgent body, he pulled the throttle, shifted gears, stepped on the gas, until, groaning, grinding, lurching, the bus made the summit. On these occasions, all the passengers fell silent and held their breath, as if they could thus lighten the load.

But by-and-by came a crisis which required special manipulation; nothing less than a railroad crossing at the sharp top of a hill. As it approached, we could feel the bus gather its forces, like a bull preparing to charge; and, like a bull, it roared upward, plunging headlong at the challenge. No circumspect pausing to see whether a train might be about to claim the right of way; only a blind, heaven-rending, to-heaven-smelling attack, and then a pause so sudden that all the passengers' teeth rattled in their heads, and the driver's sandwich fell out on the floor. That the failure had been expected was clear from the presence beside the engine of a pail of water with a large wad of list soaking in it, and also from the promptness with which one of the passengers stooped, first to recover the sandwich and then to lift the wad. Under

the eye of the driver, he thrust the dripping mass far into the engine, whence a cloud of steam issued. Twice was this act of cooling persuasion repeated, while all the other passengers craned their necks to look on. Then once more, "Hoop-la!" everyone shouted. The self-starter whirled, the fishing rod dipped, the throttle and accelerator joined forces, the engine, assisted by the entire bus-load, made a supreme effort, and over the tracks we went. Such a well-concerted triumph I have seldom witnessed. If a train had come along just then and sent that whole group of people to heaven or hell, I daresay they would have accepted the destination as precisely what they had had in mind all along.

But, lest I incur some regrettable reproach on the part of Mexican traffic officers, I must add that I have reported this incident simply as it impressed me, and I doubt not the track crossing was safer than it appeared.

Partly because of the difficulty of exit, partly because of a well-grounded fear of getting lost, we stuck to our seats in the bus until it reached its terminus at the Zocalo. By this time, the driver had become very friendly, smiling often, offering us refreshment from his paper bag, trying out bits of English. We almost hated to part with him, and warmly returned his "*Adios*," when we scrambled out. But we had no sorrow at leaving the bus. Almost as tired as if we had walked all the way in from Guadalupe, we tumbled into the nearest taxi and were driven back to Shirley Court. That bus ride was an

adventure which we would by no means have missed, but should not care to repeat.

The rest of our Mexican experience was brief. Long before dawn the next morning (and yet it was seven o'clock), we paid our bill at Shirley Court, said, yes, thank you, we hoped to come again some time, and started north over the Pan American Highway which now seemed an old friend. The day was beautiful and the drive superb. Familiarity bred no contempt for that glorious welter of mountains through which the road, greatly daring, leaped and soared and plunged. In fact, of course, it is silly to speak of familiarity with anything so diversely magnificent. We could only be thankful that a second glimpse had allowed us to look a little more closely, see a little further into the bewildering pattern of the ordered chaos. To take that drive every week for four or five years might make it familiar. Possibly.

In Tamazunchale, we spent two nights and a day, renewing acquaintance with the Zelinskys, reading an accumulation of letters, wandering about the village in order to stamp it securely in our memories. Greatly to our gratification, we found that many of the people remembered us. Groups of children hailed Christopher and laughingly made little frames of their crossed fingers before one eye, as he does when he is selecting a subject for a picture. "'Allo Good-by" greeted us everywhere. "'Allo!" we answered, balking at the other word now that we were about to put it in practice. We loved that little town.

The four-hundred-mile drive to Monterrey was the longest we had ever taken in one day, and was increased by a *détour* into a dismal Mexican hamlet in search of gas. I don't like to remember that hamlet. There was something sinister about it which threatened the integrity of my now carefully finished conception of Mexico. But, just for that reason, it was valuable. For again and again, during the past weeks, I had asked myself how it was possible that revolutions could ever take place among such gentle, courteous people. The arid streets of the unshaded village were glaring in the sun when we entered it, and the few human beings in evidence shot sultry glances at us. Nobody smiled, nobody replied to our greeting, nobody vouchsafed an answer to our inquiry for "gasolena." Finally, we discovered a Pemex sign by a closed door, and, knocking persistently, received a curt dismissal from within. Our plight was serious, for a long stretch of mountain road lay between us and the next gas station. If there was any gas for sale in that village, we were determined to have it. A small boy came to our rescue. Climbing on our running board, he directed us to a house where, after several attempts, he succeeded in routing out a reluctant, indignant, brigandish-looking person who, without so much as a glance in our direction (and that was probably just as well), disappeared in an outhouse with a ten-liter can. This he presently emptied into our tank. His manner of receiving payment, though far from reluctant, was that of one

whose injuries have now been capped by unspeakable insult.

It may be that the reason for that town's fierceness of inhospitality lay in nothing more serious than an interrupted siesta, but it served to warn me that my notion of gentleness as summing up the Mexican nature was possibly inadequate.

The otherwise regrettable *détour* had still another value which, lasting perhaps half a minute in time, gave us an enduring memory. Because of the exact period of our delay, our resumed progress along the highway brought us to a certain spot in the jungle just as a great flock of green and blue parrots wheeled across it. The sumptuous flashing of the jeweled bodies, the strong beat of the gorgeous wings, was worth the trouble we had experienced.

So was the picturesqueness of Santiago worth the ten-mile *détour* which a road-mending process compelled us to make just before reaching Monterrey. According to our guidebook, this small town has the longest village street in the world; and, in the dusk of the early evening, it was thronged with *sarape*- and *reboso*-clad people, with burros, pigs and chickens. We had to drive carefully.

Because of all these incidents, it was late when we arrived at La Cilla Camps, and we were very tired. But a cottage awaited us and dinner was still being served in the restaurant where the waiter remembered and welcomed us. Then bed and abysmal sleep.

In the flexible fashion which characterizes all our travels, we had expected to spend several days in

Monterrey, seeing the things neglected on our previous visit. When we woke the next morning, however, we knew that nothing was so desired by either of us as immediate departure. For one reason, our ear was pealing. For another reason, I had retrieved the sore throat which I had left here in December, and stood in logical dread of the consequences. But, for the reason of reasons, illogical and triumphant, we were thoroughly homesick for our native land. We might criticize and deride it, we might grow bored and impatient with it, we might even now and then play with the idea of living elsewhere. No use. We were native citizens of the United States, and it was there that we belonged.

So, once more, we packed our bags, did a few errands in Monterrey shops, and turned our car's nose toward Laredo.

A stop for luncheon at Sabinas Hidalgo brought home to us the fact that here was our last chance to buy Mexican souvenirs; and, having resisted this lure through all the bazaars of Taxco and Mexico City, we fell heavily for it now. Into the rear of our car went bright Toluca baskets, Puebla tiles, Taxco jewelry. If Christopher had not discouraged me, I should have bought a *sarape* to wear as an evening wrap; and I am grateful to him every time I visualize my startling appearance in a sober New England gathering.

The transit of the Rio Grande was a cause of mingled emotions. Behind us lay a barely glimpsed land of romance and beauty, pain and sorrow, mys-

tery, failure, perseverance, hope, effort, promise, a land of rich experience beyond most human lots. Were we not very foolish to come away when we had just begun to divine its significance? But before us lay the land which, for better or worse, was the only place where we could fulfill our small personal destinies. We were glad to recover it.

"'Allo Good-by," I said softly as our wheels crossed the middle of the bridge.

"Fi cents," added Christopher ruefully. "We're going to need them now."

{19}

OUR NATIVE LAND was, however, not in the least aware of the tribute we paid it in returning thus promptly, and San Antonio made no bones about declaring that fulfilment of our personal destinies was no concern of hers.

"Gray skies over Texas," said Christopher forebodingly as we headed north from Laredo. "Well," he added, with his unfailing philosophy, "the change may be restful after so many weeks of sunshine."

Back once more in the superlative motor court, with all the conveniences of our comfort-loving country at hand, we were for a day or two deeply content. Just to be free from the strain of constant attention and query was an unexpected relief. For seven weeks we had been on the alert, not only to perceive the obvious beauty and meaning of a strange civilization, but also especially to catch the overtones; and we were tired. Even my cold served me well at first, for it led my doctor to give me a shot in the arm which plunged me into hours of sleep. Christopher, meantime, resorted to a lending library where he discovered some books on Mexico. Our wisdom in coming away was increasingly apparent. We had had all we could bear of immediate experience. Now repose and detachment were needed to help us under-

stand what we had seen and heard. We merely wanted a corner in which to sit and think.

There are corners and corners, however; and in a few days we realized that San Antonio was not a good one for our purpose. In fact, just at present, it was not a corner at all, but a hole with no outlook on the world. The gray sky clamped down over it solidly, rain fell every day, a mean wind searched the streets. Our cottage was alternately steaming with heat from the gas stove, or clammy with cold from the open windows. We had nothing to do except read and write: occupations too delightful in themselves to allow of the misuse of overdoing. We had nowhere to go in this weather except to the ear doctor and the movies. Apparently we were in for one of those sessions of marking time which try the souls of travelers more than all the vicissitudes of fatigue and difficulty.

"Well," said Christopher, "it's a challenge. Let's take it as that. Let's refuse to be bored."

"Or, if we can't help it," I put in, "let's remember that one of the values of travel lies in learning how other people live, and that lots of them are bored most of the time. We'll see how they manage."

"We'll go to the movies this afternoon," Christopher continued, mapping out a suitable program. "Just any old movie that comes along."

"Then we'll have an ice cream soda, and go to the Five and Ten."

"What for?" Christopher questioned.

"Nothing," I answered. "We don't need even a

shoestring. But the Five and Ten is a complete panorama of American life. I've often thought a book could be written from the material supplied there, and I'd like to begin taking notes."

"After that," Christopher concluded, "we'll have dinner at a cafeteria and come home and play double solitaire."

The movie proved very instructive. At first I feared we had gone rather too far in our efforts to share the pabulum of the world-weary and had hit on a merely vapid time killer. But, as the film developed, I saw that it was a devastating satire.

The first scenes depicted a dense forest of pine trees, one of those regions which form the glory of our continent. Inviolable and triumphant, they thrilled the spectator. But presently an army of wood choppers arrived, and soon the mountain streams and the rivers were choked by rafts of logs. After that, a screaming sawmill ended the prologue to the play.

The play itself concerned the adventures of an establishment entirely given over to the manufacture and sale of wooden clappers. It was an imposing building, full of expensively furnished offices, wide halls, swiftly gliding elevators, autocratic superiors, obsequious attendants, hurrying messenger boys, busy stenographers, strident telephones, everything that betokens a successful enterprise of the utmost importance going at full speed. In the Private Office of the President a committee meeting was in session, and all its members looked as if the fate of nations depended on them. They took serious counsel together,

compared notes pulled from huge tooled-leather briefcases, shook their groomed heads gravely. It was evident that some question had been raised as to the one-hundred-per-cent efficiency of their product, clitter-clatters.

Finally the committee decided to make a tour of investigation through the demonstration rooms which comprised most of the lofty building. It was here that the real meaning of the film began to dawn on me.

In one room, an orchestra was playing, with clitter-clatters to mark the rhythm. An audience, composed presumably of temporarily unoccupied salesmen, applauded with clitter-clatters.

In another room, an orator was addressing a similar audience and clitter-clatters here served both to drive home the points of the speech and to register its effect on the hearers.

In a ballroom, people were dancing to clitter-clatters. On the stage of a small theater, a clitter-clatter ballet was in progress. In a classroom, a kind of clitter-clatter language was being taught.

Babies in cradles, housewives in the kitchen, students in their libraries, conductors in busses, farmers in their hay-fields, sailors, explorers, merchants, realtors, beauticians: there was no class of men and women without a special kind of clitter-clatter to set the pace of its activity. The tumult was of course tremendous; and, as the investigating committee listened to it, their faces cleared and they nodded at one another. All was going well. Especially since,

from the storeroom, huge boxes of clitter-clatters were being shipped to every part of the world.

Then abruptly the scene changed, and once more the original forest appeared on the curtain, inviolate and triumphant.

There is no comment to be made on such a movie, except perhaps that it seems to contain the essence of Spengler, Dean Swift, and Isaiah, with a dash of Clarence Day.

I am sure that no hidden reason exists for the fact that the movie theaters in San Antonio are among the finest in the country. As on our previous visit here, I was, and am still, convinced of the prevailing excellence of the city's weather. But, being out of luck, or favor, ourselves, we appreciated the deep, comfortable chairs, the admirable lighting and ventilation, the flawless release of the reels.

San Antonio's restaurants are good too. There was one in particular, down a short flight of steps, whose waiters received us as if we had been invited guests, and served us deftly with appetizing food. But a meal at a cafeteria took longer, so we generally went there.

It was in a way ignominious to be reduced to time killing, and sometimes I queried whether we ought not to discover or invent a profitable occupation. Always, however, I came back to the conclusion that a test of endurance is profitable in itself, and that an enlargement of sympathy is never superfluous. So many people nowadays have, in spite of their desire

and effort, nothing to do but kill time. It was salutary to know how they felt.

Of course we had always the daily hope of some change of circumstance. The skies might clear. Our doctor might let us go. An unexpected event of an unspecified nature, just any event, might take a few hours off our hands. To this sanguine expectation we woke every morning, peered out of the window, then dropped back and tried to go to sleep again. Rain and wind, wind and rain. Out of the nineteen days we spent in San Antonio, only two were pleasant.

Fortunately, we knew quite surely and ardently where we wanted to go when at last our release should be granted. The final palsy of indecision was not demanded of us. Letters from home warned us not to turn north. The winter had been a stiff one and was lingering long. On the other hand, letters from Arizona reported an early spring with glorious weather, and urged us to make haste.

Arizona!

In two other books I have told how we love it. Especially one little corner of it (the kind of corner I mentioned above) where we had spent one whole winter. Doubtless, any psychiatrist could have prophesied from the beginning of our present journey that it would end in Arizona. And the magic destination was now only a thousand miles away. After the nine or ten thousand our speedometer had accumulated since leaving home, that seemed only a step.

Nevertheless, to our San Antonio doctor, it seemed a step which must not be taken in bad weather; and

our training in boredom developed into the discipline of controlled exasperation. We were in a vicious circle. Rain made our ear worse, and rain forbade our departure. Day after day, we said good-by to our doctor. Day after day, we again presented ourself for treatment by his skillful hands. Day after day after day.

Finally, even to the doctor, it became evident that there was some connection between our presence in the city and the persistent deluge, and that, until we took the initiative, the rain would never stop.

"Unless it actually pours," he said, taking leave of us for the seventh time, "you'd better start tomorrow."

Whereupon, as we left his office, a cloudburst flooded the streets.

But there's this to be said for cloudbursts, that they don't last long; and, by mid-afternoon, we were busy and happy (oh, happy!) getting ready to go. Just to have something real and substantial to do was bliss, just to put an hour to use instead of killing it, just to untie string after string of a Gordian knot. We packed up all our belongings and stowed them away in the car. We returned our books to the library. We made farewell calls on the few people we knew in the Court. We dashed downtown for one or two purchases. We were so delirious with the delight of being actively busy again that we wore ourselves out, and so were able to go to bed early and sleep well. Our probation was over. We were free to

start for Arizona. Arizona, land of heart's desire, only two days distant. We were free to go at last.

"Never," said Christopher solemnly, as he threw his pack of cards into the wastebasket, "never do I want to hear of solitaire again."

When I woke in the gray dawn (very gray!) I heard a familiar sound on the roof. Was it rain? But that was a silly question. As if I didn't know by this time exactly how rain sounded. As if, anyway, there could ever be any sound but that of rain on this roof. The real question was: is it pouring? I slid out of bed and lifted a windowshade to investigate. Alas! no occupant of a diving bell ever looked out on a more completely watery universe. The windowpanes were streaming, the street was a river and the sidewalk a pool. Almost in tears myself, I returned to bed.

But it was not for nothing that Christopher had burnt his cards behind him. He was now in no mood to be balked.

"It's not pouring at all," he asserted, as he likewise consulted the window. "It's just raining a little. We're going. I tell you, we're going. Come on. There's bacon and eggs for breakfast, and toast and marmalade. We'll have to go after that, for there'll be no food left in the house. And, if it's too stormy to travel, it's too stormy to market. Come on."

I came with a will.

The sky lifted an eyebrow when our door opened and Christopher, in his raincoat, went to fetch our

car from the garage. A faint crack permitted the sun to give us a veiled and fleeting glance of surprise as we added our overnight suitcases to the collection in the tonneau. Then down came the rain in a fury.

"No," said Christopher stubbornly, "this isn't pouring. It's merely cat-and-dogging. San Antonio's got it in for us; we'll have it out with her."

San Antonio's streets are slippery in wet weather (slick they call it out there), and we had to drive carefully as we threaded our way to the western exit of Route 90. The pendulum of our windshield wiper beat with fierce rapidity; spray flew from our rear wheels. We were quite too preoccupied to pay much attention to anything but traffic lights and route signs; and it was only carelessly, out of the tail of one eye, that I noticed a gleam of something vaguely familiar, evoking happy memories of an almost forgotten past. When at last, however, we had skidded around our final corner and straightened our wheels for a long arrowy boulevard, we simultaneously caught our breath in a gasp of amazement and then let it go in a shout of joy. Blue sky! Acres and acres of it, miles and miles and miles. In fact, there was nothing but blue sky before us, from the blessed western horizon up to the very zenith. The rapture of the spectacle was beyond all words. We had done it too, we had turned the trick. Having kept us docile prisoners so long, the hidden sun had found itself unable to believe in our rebellious departure; and, before it knew what it was doing, had cleared away leagues of cloud in order to watch us. As our

rear wheels crossed the city limits, a burst of golden glory flooded us from behind; and, leaning forward, I stopped the windshield wiper. Blue sky. Sunshine. Arizona. It was all too good to be true. Quite of its own accord, our speedometer leaped from forty to sixty. To paraphrase *Macbeth*, nothing in our life in San Antonio became us like the leaving it.

And yet, before we leave it forever, I must say once more that I truly like the city. In good weather, I am sure it is gracious and friendly. We were out of luck, that's all.

The western half of Texas is so much more interesting than the eastern that, even if sheer flight had not been ravishing to us, we should have enjoyed the landscape. Rolling hills in the morning distance developed into mountains in the afternoon; and presently they invaded our foreground. The crossing of Pecos Canyon was a dramatic episode. With every mile, the country became more typical of the Southwest which we love, and we hailed every new butte and cactus with delight. Even the wind was for once not unwelcome. It swept the whole horizon clear. Blue sky and sunshine. Sunshine, blue sky. We could not get enough of them.

Our first night we spent at Marfa in an excellent small hotel which was just then much concerned with preparations for the formal dedication of the new telescope in the observatory on the high crest of a neighboring mountain. We had read of the construction of this big lens; and, under different circumstances, might have felt tempted to linger and see it

installed. But that would have meant killing another week; and, thank you, no! Anyway, Arizona now called, beckoned, pulled.

Our second morning gave me a chance to try out the first of two conclusions which, though I would not have shirked them for anything, I yet rather dreaded. On a previous journey through Texas, we had passed a mountain which had seemed to me one of the loveliest peaks in the world: Sierra Blanca. At the time, I had never expected to see it again, and I had hung out of the car window in order to study it as long as it remained in sight. With the result that it had assumed a highly improbable value in my imagination. I feared that a second encounter would prove disappointing. What then was my gratification to find that I liked it better than ever. I had remembered it as ashen gray, with a purple stain on its breast; but this time I found it all rosy. Like the smooth, firm flesh of a beautiful woman. There was something chaste and aloof about it. The inviolate serenity which clothed it was one of detachment. Again, as before, I wanted to stop and sit down at its feet.

Two hours later, however, there was no apparent serenity left anywhere in the universe, and the only detachment available seemed that of one car wheel from another and all four wheels from the road. On the outskirts of El Paso a sand storm struck us, the first of our experience. Luckily, it overtook us directly in front of a restaurant; and, parking in a fairly sheltered place, we ran for cover and lunch.

It had been our intention to make an early afternoon call on some friends in El Paso. We hoped, by eating slowly, to sit the storm out. But when we emerged, we discovered that the state of the elements was wildly unmanageable. The wind tore at our hair and garments, dust filled eyes, ears, and mouths. We could not see five yards before us. Our car, when at last we reached it, trembled like a frightened rabbit; and, backing out into the melee, Christopher narrowly escaped an invisible hydrant on one side and an unseen truck on the other. Making calls was out of the question. It would be as much as ever if we succeeded in holding our route through and out of the city. That we did so we now consider a kind of miracle.

Once out in the open, conditions were better in that there was here no traffic, but worse in that the wind had full sweep. It was as if thousands of hands were wrenching at our doors and windows, showering us with sand, old boxes and papers, tumbleweed, refuse of nature and civilization. In less than an hour, we knew it would be impossible to make Lordsburg, our chosen overnight stop; in another half-hour, we realized that it was foolish to continue any further. Yet we did drive to Deming, where we gave in and followed the tail-lights of a line of blundering, groping cars into a wayside motor court.

"Well," said Christopher, drawing a long breath and beginning to comb and brush and shake and wash the sand from his person, "it's only half-past three. We've got some more time to kill."

"Half-past two," the court owner corrected him, coming in with the register. "Time changes in El Paso."

The crowning touch of that unwelcome hour added such insult to our injury that, with one accord, we both lay down under it and slept it off.

The rest of the day was dismal. It is one thing to meet a definite challenge to good sportsmanship and see it through; quite another thing to find the same old shabby, worn-out glove flung at one's feet again. Life itself should be a better sport than that. There was therefore resentment in the doggedness with which we set ourselves to confront each minute and wring its neck.

I felt especially sullen because the delay gave me leisure to face the second of the two conclusions I mentioned above in connection with Sierra Blanca. Was it true, as all our friends had warned us, that, in returning to Cactus Forest, we ran a grave risk of disillusionment? Was it not, in fact, more than probable that chagrin awaited us there?

We had loved the place dearly two years before; and, returning home, I had written a book about it, hoping thus to share it with others, hoping to induce others to go and see for themselves. In this book I had been very careful not to exaggerate the delights I had found in Cactus Forest. For I thought it was probably true that my personal bias toward the desert had led me to overestimate the charm of this little group of houses. Moreover, I had understood clearly that no place in the world is perfect, and that

to depict Arizona as flawless would be to lose rather than win the confidence of my readers. So I had deliberately cast about in my mind to assemble all the shortcomings of climate and topography I could remember.

The result was oddly instructive. Most of the Eastern reviews of the book found it infatuated with Arizona. Most of the Western papers came down on me like a thousand of brick because I had said that the wind blew, that the towns were crude, that—but, no, I am not going to repeat all the mistakes I made. The Phoenix Chamber of Commerce wrote me a five-page, foolscap, single-space letter, meeting my criticisms one by one and demolishing them. I was distressed and bewildered. Of course it was gratifying to have my little book taken so seriously; but the uniform failure to realize what a deep love Arizona had kindled in me floored me entirely. One especially scathing review in a Florence paper (*et tu*, Florence) swept me into the dust heap because of the epithet I had applied to the County Courthouse. My stock in Florence was therefore very low, and I could not but admit the imprudence of my return.

Yet here I stood on the Arizona border again, prudence cast to the very wind I had so unfortunately mentioned. And the wind itself was doing its best to blow me away. I did some sober thinking as we sat in our motor court cabin that stormy afternoon.

The next morning was radiant; as serene as if the Phoenix Chamber of Commerce had worked a Christian Science cure on the barometrical errors of the

previous day. And indeed we accepted this state of affairs as the enduring reality of the Southwest. Once more our spirits rose. Blithely we packed our bags, ate a good breakfast at a Greyhound bus station, and proceeded on our way toward the state line. New Mexico did all very well, but it was Arizona we wanted. Arizona, here we come!

Our route was both strange and familiar. Two years before, we had driven south from Lordsburg and entered Arizona by way of Tucson. This time we went due west over the Globe Pass. We had left Arizona by this route in the spring of our previous visit, but every road looks different when traveled in a reverse direction. Since now we had the mountains before instead of behind us, the beauty of the landscape was even more thrilling than we had remembered it.

Globe Pass had once been rather a boggy with me because of its steep corkscrew curves; but, after the roadbeds of Mexico, I had no slightest dread of the lesser challenge. Having therefore eaten our luncheon at a Globe restaurant formerly frequented by us, we started cheerfully, even carelessly, on an adventure the memory of which still gives me a touch of goose flesh.

The trouble was nothing less than the remedy designed to put an end to trouble. The Globe Pass road was being widened, and dozens of bulky machines reduced its available traffic space to the merest shoestrings: especially, as a matter of course, in the region of the worst curves; and, equally as a

matter of course, on the very edge of the precipice, for the machines had to work backward into the mountain sides.

There was one steam shovel perched insecurely on the crest of a loose sliding mass of gravel about fifteen feet above the road. How it ever got up there we could not imagine, nor why its snorting weight did not bring it crashing down upon us as we crept slowly by.

In another ticklish spot, there was a load of baled alfalfa approaching from the other direction; one of those huge toppling structures which Westerners delight to build. "Gosh!" said Christopher dubiously. But he had no choice but to pass it, and on the outer edge too.

"Wait!" cried one of the road workers, dropping his shovel and running to superintend the operation. "You'll have to back up a little," he told Christopher. "About two feet and a half. Not an inch more, or you'll go over. I'll direct you. Now: back; back; keep on backing; STOP!"

I dared not look out of the window into the thousand-foot drop, but I thought I felt the right rear wheel give a little.

"Come on now!" yelled the road worker to the load of alfalfa. Then, as it lurched toward us, he made a sublimely futile but generous gesture. Moving out into the six inches of space between the two vehicles and smiling protectingly at us, he laid his open palm against the side of the bales. "Step on it!" he advised Christopher. And, with a roar of our

engine and a sickening rattle of stones from our rear wheels, we regained the road. "Thanks a lot!" shouted Christopher over his shoulder, but, I am afraid, unheard.

I was weaker after this episode than after our transit of the whole Pan American Highway.

But weakness was not a bad mood in which to descend the other side of Globe Pass into the desert. Peace, repose, reassurance awaited us there. We said very little as we swung out above the loved region. "There's Superstition." "Oh, look, there's Picacho." "I can see the Florence water tower." "Is that Mount Lord?" "No, it's the queer little peak near Casa Grande." Why people should always be surprised to find landmarks still in their places is a problem for the psychiatrists, but it certainly adds a piquant pleasure to the joy of returning. We had loved this valley and left it. Now we were eagerly glad to recover it in all its details.

Just for a moment we were disappointed to find nobody to welcome us at Cactus Forest Ranch. Our arrival had been so uncertain that our hosts were away. Our cottage was ready for us, however, and, almost at once we realized that to slip quietly back thus into the desert was the best reception. Without even waiting to unload our car, we took one look around our little home, then walked out among the sahuaros. We were back in one of the two places where we indubitably belong.

{20}

FROM THE moment of our arrival, I knew that my fears of disillusionment had been nonsense. Cactus Forest Ranch, with all that it stood for, seemed even more delightful than two years before. This was largely because I now found it to be real and substantial, no figment of an embellishing imagination. The place was something to count on as well as dream about. With all the will in the world, I gave myself to the business of renewing and strengthening our ties with it.

Probably we were fortunate in what was at first a disappointment. The cottage of our former habitation was occupied, and we had to take a wholly unfamiliar one, back on the desert. Here nothing was quite as we remembered it; and, in addition to the pleasure of return, we had the fillip of adjustment and discovery. Instead of a view of Picacho, we had one of Superstition; instead of other guests for neighbors, we had a homesteader; instead of dwelling on the brink of the desert, we were surrounded by it. The change was salutary; and, in no time at all, we felt quite at home.

If telegrams had not been so expensive and so overemphatic, I should have sent a triumphant one

to the foreboding friends who had warned us not to return here and shatter a rosy dream.

As it was, I wrote a long letter; for really I had to indulge in some jubilation over the fact that all the cottages were full of tenants who had been brought hither by my book, and that they loved the place.

"You mustn't get people out there under false pretenses." Thus my admonishing critics. "Remember, you and Christopher have very peculiar ideas and were born with rose-colored glasses on your noses. Most ordinary individuals would be bored to death in Cactus Forest."

Bored! With shining eyes and outstretched hands, they approached us, and thanked us heartily.

There is probably nothing like the bond of a common peculiarity (if that is not a contradiction in terms) to ensure cordial relations. The cult of Cactus Forest Ranch made its devotees blood kin.

A chuck-wagon restaurant had been built on the ranch since our last visit, and all the guests ate their dinners there together, at separate tables but chatting from one to another. The resulting comradeship was one of the pleasantest possible to human beings; so flexible, so independent, yet so warm. Nobody minded what clothes you had on, what mood you were in, what contribution, if any, you had to make to the conversation. Now and then the group was augmented by cowboys dropping in for a snack, or by tourists on their way to Tucson or Phoenix. The latter always regarded us with speculative eyes, and not infrequently asked to see a cottage afterwards.

The whole thing was exhilarating. The royalties on that book, *Cactus Forest*, lead me to infer that its readers take turns drawing the same copy from the public library, or else loan it to one another; but never mind. I'd rather have shared Cactus Forest Ranch with the people there last winter than be a millionaire.

Of course there were social drawbacks too, of a local nature. A Florence newspaper printed a front-page article entitled—but, no, I have sworn not to repeat the epithet I applied to the Courthouse. And, indeed, I was and am apologetic. The opprobrious term slipped out casually and was never meant to be taken as a major issue. I quite understand that the building in question was once the pride of the valley, and that, in another half century, most of our present architectural glories will be—well, let us change the subject. The point is a sore one all around.

Nevertheless, two members of the local Woman's Club came to call and asked me to address their next meeting, which was generous. And the Chamber of Commerce wrote us a very nice letter. So that I hope Florence really knows how much we like it and how eagerly we anticipate its beneficent future.

As our cottage was different from that of two years before, so were many other things dissimilar. The weather was consistently superb. Day after day of clear sunshine, with only clouds enough to make magnificent sunsets. Dry heat that soothed and solaced without enervating. A full moon, turning the desert into a place of veiled vision, muted clarity.

All our bodily frets were forgotten as if they had never been, and our souls expanded happily.

But it was to our minds and imaginations that this sojourn proved especially interesting. Our homesteading neighbor came to call on us; and, when we in turn went to see her, we found her little house filled with and surrounded by prehistoric Indian artifacts. She was one of those persons who, having a natural flair for some special type of article, can never go anywhere without finding specimens.

Apparently, though all parts of the desert are now under some nominal ownership, the boundaries are vague and the restrictions elastic. So that a homesteader, wandering in search of fuel, feels free to appropriate not only broken fragments of cactus wood but also any trophies he or she happens to find. In addition to this general latitude, our neighbor, Mrs. Baldwin, had been given free range of an absent friend's claim near by, and had there discovered the ruins of an Indian village buried beneath the sand.

Hearing our exclamations and noting our interest as we entered her house, she discarded the social formalities with which she had been about to receive us and plunged straight into the happy business of showing us her collection and talking about it. Just where and when she had found this piece and that, just how it had been made, just what it was used for. She had read and studied as well as explored; she knew what she was saying.

I can see that it must have been fun to share a hobby with two people as wide-eyed and attentive as Chris-

topher and I were on this occasion; but our interest might also have roused misgivings in an ungenerous nature. Not so in Mrs. Baldwin's. Pausing in her rapid flow of information, she regarded us appraisingly a moment, then said,

"Why don't you come out in the desert with me tomorrow and dig for yourselves?"

I wish I could make an adequate pen picture of her. She was a little woman, with short curly gray hair, bright gray eyes, and hardworking hands that had a gentle way with them. Her dog and her cats adored her. Her guest room was seldom empty. While we were her neighbors, it was occupied by an old lady who, falling ill, had said to her doctor, "Well, if I've got to be sick, I'd rather be with Molly Baldwin than anyone else"; and, arriving the next day, unannounced, was welcomed and put to bed. That's the way they do things in the Southwest.

When Mrs. Baldwin drove up to our door on the morning after her invitation to us, she wore blue denim overalls, a faded blue blouse, and a wide-brimmed straw hat with a hole in it. Also heavy boots laced to the knee. Concerning her Ford run-about she was jocular but affectionate. It was of an ancient vintage and made a good deal of noise.

"But part of that's tools for digging," she explained as she stopped with a jolt and a crash.

Christopher and I felt distinctly grotesque as we stood there in our low shoes, silk stockings, and city hats (mine even had a noseveil!); but Mrs. Baldwin forebore to criticize us by so much as a glance. Her

good breeding also constrained her to ignore the fact that our low-hung car had some trouble in following her over the bumps of the desert road which her runabout took in its stride.

All this put us on our mettle; and, when we reached the ruins, we jumped out, eager to fill our shoes to the brim with sand and start several runs in each stocking. Christopher took off his coat and collar, and I removed my hat and tied a handkerchief over my head.

It was precisely this time of year, Mrs. Baldwin explained, which was most favorable for exploring old villages. Grass, springing up over the desert, cannot grow along the lines of the buried adobe walls which are therefore outlined faintly. Sure enough, we could see for ourselves the ghostly squares in the thick green carpet. They were immensely stimulating to the imagination. We could almost plot out the old village on the edge of which we stood.

"How did it come to be buried?" I asked, not very intelligently.

"Sand blowing over it," Mrs. Baldwin replied. "The Indians went off and left it, and little by little the desert reclaimed it. The houses are not far below the surface."

By way of demonstration, she stooped and, with a long homemade auger, bored into one of the grassless places to the depth of perhaps two feet.

"There's the top of a wall," she asserted. "The roof was made of some kind of thatch and of course disappeared long ago. Well, let's get busy. Since

you're new at this kind of work, I think we'd better begin with a house I've already partly excavated."

What a wide-hearted product of the desert she was! Not only did she invite us to dig in her house, but, when her canny spade promptly hit something hard, she stood back and asked Christopher to pull out the obstacle for her. It proved to be a stone hammer, shaped with a fairly sharp edge and a grooved neck ready for binding to a wooden handle.

"No, keep it," she told Christopher.

Whereupon, I did a cruel thing which I can never atone for and which I deplore mightily. Since we had only two spades among us and anyway the old house was very small, I had let Christopher do the first digging while I stood on the bank looking on. My explicit desire was that he might turn up an arrowhead. All his life he had wanted to find one. The hope was part of his personal version of the unfulfilled ambition which haunts humanity. But I was also uneasy because his attack of sciatica two years before had been induced by digging in our Vermont garden.

"Don't you think," I ventured after ten or fifteen minutes, "that you'd better stop and rest now?"

Then, bringing to bear the pressure always effective with Christopher, I added guilefully,

"I'd like to dig awhile."

After all, it was fate, not I, that was cruel. For, if I had known what it was that my spade threw out from my first load of sand, I should have ignored

it. But, seeing a small object drop on the edge of the hole near Christopher's feet, I said carelessly,

"That's probably only a shard, but you'd better pick it up."

Whereupon, with a complex expression which I shall never forget, Christopher held out to me a perfect arrowhead.

I was really stricken. In vain did Mrs. Baldwin and I both argue that Christopher was the real discoverer; that his fingers, touching the arrowhead for the first time since its original owner had dropped it so many centuries ago, had every claim to it. He had not unearthed it and so would not consider it his. I climbed out of the hole very soberly and relinquished the shovel; but not another arrowhead appeared in the desert during all the time we were there.

Thus do we poor blundering human beings snatch from under the eyes of the people we love best their most cherished dreams.

After this first morning, there were very few days when we did not go out on the desert with Mrs. Baldwin. Christopher staked out a house for himself and embarked on a complete excavation. He found knives and scrapers and a large sea-shell from the Gulf of California. I generally sat in the car, looking on; or wandered about, mentally reconstructing the arena of early American domesticity.

One evening, when Christopher and I had spent the day in Phoenix, Mrs. Baldwin stopped at our house on her way home from her digging. Her eyes

were brighter than ever, and there was in her whole manner a suppressed excitement.

"Don't go away tomorrow," she said. "You mustn't. I need you. I think"—she paused to give her words greater impressiveness—"I think I've discovered a burial. Half an hour ago, just as I was about to stop work, my spade hit something hard which wasn't a tool or an urn. Getting down on my knees with my trowel, I loosened the earth until I had cleared what I'm almost certain is the back of a skull. I want you to come with me tomorrow and help uncover it."

That this was an act of generosity transcending all her previous openhandedness, we understood quite completely; and it was in a lively mood of gratitude, admiration, and curiosity that we followed our neighbor over the now familiar bumps early the next morning. Prompted by advice derived from the perusal of archaeological papers, Christopher had added a whisk broom and some fine paintbrushes to his spade and trowel. I had a pair of tweezers and a pocket penknife. We both conserved our breath for blowing as well as marveling. We knew that lightness of touch (if any at all) is of the utmost importance in unearthing skeletons.

The process was a slow one and more matter-of-fact in its nature than I should have thought possible. Exhumations are the stock in trade of sensational stories, and at least some slight feeling of horror seemed only respectable. These bones which we regarded so dispassionately were those of a fellow

creature, dead for centuries. Inscrutable mystery shrouded them. Science could probably tell us how old they were, of what ethnological family, but not whether tears had fallen upon them or hatred had stamped them down. We ought to be working gravely, even with reverence. But, instead, we were brisk and cheerful as ants and voluble as coyotes.

"Here's one of his ribs."

"Here's a tibia."

"Oh, look! there's his jawbone. Be very careful now."

Because, I suppose, of the difficulty of digging with the ancient stone shovels, the grave was shallow. Our spades were soon discarded for our trowels, and the trowels in turn for brushes. My special tool was a whisk broom. With it I went to work very lightly and carefully on the lower part of the skull, and presently found myself giving that old Indian the first toothbrushing he had ever had. The effect was miraculous. With a flash, the collection of bones came together into a recognizable person, stripped of his flesh but not of his spirit, grinning amiably at us from his long obscurity. Mrs. Baldwin and Christopher stood back and cheered. We all stopped to rest, with a feeling that now there were four of us. Yet, never for a moment was there any touch of the macabre about the situation. The whole affair was as simple and wholesome as sagebrush.

When we had him fully uncovered, our skeleton proved to be that of a man (so adjudged by the relative width of his hips and shoulders), lying on his

back with his feet crossed and one arm thrown across his body. There was something exceedingly jaunty about him. Apparently he found it good to have died, but did not resent revisiting the glimpses of the desert moon which now hung pallid and waning over him. That he had died young we were sure from the condition of his teeth, still unworn by the Indian diet of corn.

Well, now, what to do with him? His chest and abdominal cavities were of course filled and packed solid with sand. To remove him would be a job for an expert. But expert opinion was just what we wanted. So, without much discussion and with no disagreement, we decided to report the discovery to the museum at Casa Grande.

The result was the prompt arrival of a couple of rangers, bringing with them a heavy tarpaulin and the makings of a barbed-wire enclosure. They explained that their archaeologist was temporarily absent on a trip with some other scientists, but that they expected him back any day and would meantime provide protection for the skeleton. While they were about it, they photographed the old fellow and took a good look at him, hazarding the opinion that he dated from about the thirteenth century.

This date was a disappointment to me. I had hoped we had found a Hohokam, remote ancestor of the Indian tribes, like the Toltecs in Mexico of an unknown antiquity. And, if that view were untenable, I preferred something more modern, such as a Spanish conquistador. Something colorful and dra-

matic. Unfortunately, however, though archaeology must perforce practice an open-minded flexibility, it draws the line at amateur whims; and I presently had to put up with the information that the teeth I had brushed were cut only six hundred years ago and belonged to a member of the Salada tribe which emigrated to this region from the head of the Salt River. At any rate, he lived and died before Columbus was born, and so was prehistoric. The last news we had of him before we left Arizona was that he had been removed to the Casa Grande museum. Next time we go out, we shall see him behind a glass case, but I hope his feet will still be crossed with the same airy grace.

We stayed longer in Cactus Forest Ranch than we had expected to, and every day deepened the spell of the spot. But there comes a time when even the most alluring place, which yet is not home, loses its power to hold one. For home is something more than location; it is the viable stuff of one's own life. In order to work well, one must return to the secure center of one's periphery. And this year, although we had been away only four months, we had so greatly enlarged our horizon, not only in space but also in time, that fatigue overtook us sooner than usual. The homesickness which dogs our footsteps on every journey proceeded to trip us up. Therefore, towards the end of March, we started East.

The last thing which happened to me in Cactus Forest was something which I shall assuredly never forget. We had left our cottage and said good-by

to all the ranch tenants, and I was sitting on a bench outside the chuck wagon, waiting for Christopher to put some last things into the car, when Rex, the proprietor's one-man dog, came slowly around the corner. He was so completely devoted to his master and so entirely oblivious of all the rest of the world, that, after a few advances two years before, I had given up any hope of winning so much as a glance from him. Therefore I was almost frightened when he came up to me, laid his head in my lap, and very gently rubbed first one cheek and then the other against my knee. For as much as three minutes he caressed me thus gravely, while I held my breath; then, still without looking at me, he moved away again. There was something so deliberate and restrained about the whole proceeding that I could only conclude he was taking his turn at thanking me in his own way for the small service I had quite incidentally rendered his master. Not even the farewell breakfast, not even the basket of lunch, forged a stronger hoop of steel to rivet my affections to the desert ranch.

Our trip home was uneventful, save for a delirious detour through the topmost and inmost recesses of the Ozark Mountains where an adventurous relative had just bought a fruit farm. That took us over roads which, in Vermont, would be considered brookbeds—and waterfalls at that! But it gave us a glimpse of a hardy phase of American life, refreshing and reassuring. Also of beautiful country.

Having left Vermont in the first snowstorm of the

season, we returned in the last and heaviest. If we had not telephoned up from Troy, we should not have been able to enter our driveway at all. As it was, the two neighbors who shoveled us in, had just reached the doorstep when we arrived.

Was it good to be back?

Was it good!

We ran all over our small domain, making as much fuss as the two phoebes when they return to their nesting place over the front door. And with better reason, for we discourage the phoebes, whereas our immediate neighbors had prepared a royal welcome for us. The furnace was lighted, the water turned on, a fire was laid on the hearth, the clocks were all ticking, the beds were made, the furniture was dusted, flowers bloomed on the tables, and an invitation to supper stood propped against the living-room lamp.

Well!

But this is a book of travel, not a panegyric on the joys of return to the best place and people in the world.

Therefore:

'ALLO GOOD-BY

